

**Sport and Recreation as a Recognized and Viable Method
for Evangelism in Southern Africa**

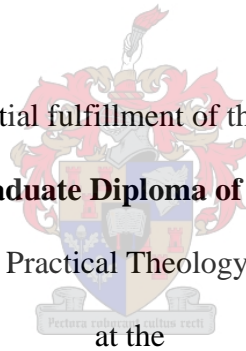
By

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Assignment presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

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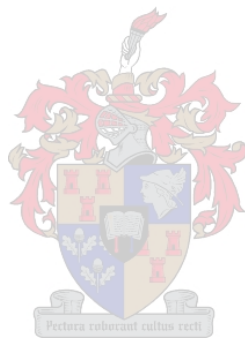
University of Stellenbosch

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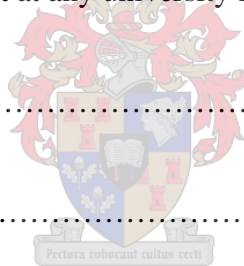
December, 2006



I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the following work contained in this assignment is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

Signature:.....

Date:.....



ABSTRACT

The basic premise of this study is to help provide a shift in the way that we think about traditional missionary work in southern Africa. Through the medium of sports ministry or sports evangelism there has been a proven track record of success around the world. Africa is especially a fertile ground for sports ministry because of a number of factors that will be shown in this research.

The popularity of sports in Africa is something that not only should the missionary embrace, but the church itself should embrace rather than condemn. As the church moves forward into this next millennium we need to be looking for alternative methods to “doing” ministry in culturally strategic ways.

The research study from the pastor’s training workshops in Malawi proved invaluable in the sense that it provided feedback as to what has been done in the churches in the field of sports evangelism; reports of hundreds of people receiving Christ through sports events and also some of the obstacles that the church in Malawi faces as it attempts to endeavor in this relatively new way of doing ministry.

This study gives the reader a chance to see the biblical reliability of beginning such a ministry as well as addressing the current social climate in southern Africa. Obstacles and successes have been given equal attention in an effort to paint a realistic picture of doing ministry in southern Africa.



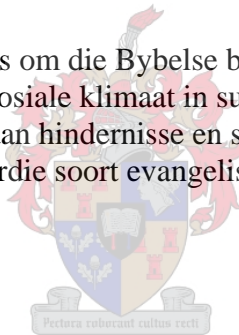
OPSOMMING

Die basiese rede vir hierdie studie is om 'n skuif te help bewerkstellig in die manier waarop ons oor tradisionele sendingwerk in suidelike Afrika dink. Daar is reeds regoor die wereld bewys dat die medium van sportbediening of sportevangelisasie suksesvol is. Die kontinent van Afrika is veral vrugbare grond vir sport evangelisasie, as gevolg van 'n hele aantal faktore, wat in hierdie studie bespreek sal word.

Die gewildheid van sport in Afrika is 'n faktor wat nie slegs deur sendelinge omarm behoort te word nie, maar die kerk moet dit ook ondersteun, in plaas daarvan om dit te veroordeel. Soos die kerk voortbeweeg in die nuwe millennium, moet na nuwe maniere gesoek word om die mense te bedien en te evangeliseer in kultureel strategiese maniere.

Die navorsingstudie wat gedoen is na verskeie opleidingsessies vir evangeliste in Malawi gehou is, was van onskatbare waarde, omrede dit terugvoering verskaf het oor wat in die kerke gedoen word in terme van sportevangelisasie. Verslae van honderde mense wat Christus aangeneem het by sport byeenkomste, asook sommige van die hindernisse wat die kerk in Malawi trotseer terwyl hulle hierdie relatiewe nuwe manier van evangelisasie aanpak, is ook uitgelig.

Hierdie studie gee die leser die kans om die Bybelse betroubaarheid van so 'n bediening te sien, en spreek ook die huidige sosiale klimaat in suidelike Afrika aan. Daar word gelyke hoeveelheid aandag gegee aan hindernisse en suksesverhale om sodoende 'n realistiese beeld te verskaf van hierdie soort evangelisasie in Afrika



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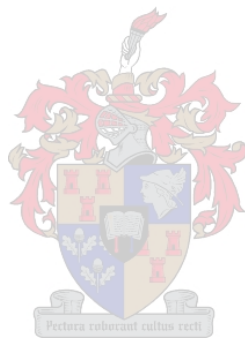
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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Topic

Can sports and recreation become a recognized and viable way for evangelism in southern Africa?

1.2 A Personal Journey

In February of 1994 I sat in the bedroom of a house that I was renting with four other guys on a cold winter night in Wheaton, Illinois. Though I was living a block from the Wheaton College campus, I was not a graduate. I had an opportunity to play basketball there 6 years earlier but I decided against it due to the extremely conservative nature of the institution. My father was a vice president on campus but I was now a graduate of Mississippi State University with a Master's degree in Exercise Physiology. Everything had seemed to fall into place, or so I had thought. That winter night I was inspired by a bible verse as I was reading and searching for some meaning in my life. The verse was in Acts 20:24 and it says this:

“ However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me--the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.”

It was that night that decided that if I were going to serve God and testify the gospel of God's grace then I needed to take an inventory of the areas where I was gifted; and that led to where my journey has begun in the area of sports ministry. Playing sports was always my favorite thing to do growing up. If it had a ball, I was interested. God gifted me with the ability to learn and excel in almost every sport that I ventured into. I eventually settled on four sports in high school and narrowed it down to basketball and tennis my first two years at university. I never really saw the connection growing up between being a Christian and playing sports. They seemed exclusive to me. I remember my basketball coach use to have us say the “Lord's Prayer” together as a team before our games and that was the only time that I felt a slight connection.

After seeking the Lord's direction that night in Wheaton, I decided to join a Christian basketball team called Sports Ambassadors. Five months later I quit my job and we did our 3- day training at Wheaton College right before we flew to the country of Panama. It was during that trip that for the first time I really saw the connection between sports and ministry. It was so simple, so eye opening! A group of basketball players played games, shared our testimony to the crowd and the opposing players, spoke in churches, passed out tracts and watched the Holy Spirit go to work! We saw hundreds of people make decisions to be followers of Christ on that trip, through eight humble basketball players. Not preachers; we were just a group of regular guys. I was sold out on

the concept and that is where my journey down this road began. The journey eventually took me to other places like Cuba, Kenya, Costa Rica, Philippines, Malawi, Guatemala, Ukraine, and South Africa.

My introduction into the world of sports ministry was a bit like the child who learns how to swim by getting thrown into the deep end of a swimming pool. So it is with great joy to go back and research how this phenomenon of sports ministry can fit into the mainstream of missions today. These are not theoretical concepts, these are case studies and events that I have experienced first hand. I have seen literally thousands come to the Lord over the past 12 years on this journey through the simple method of using sports. So how can the church use sports and people who are gifted in the area of sports and recreation as a way of reaching their communities with gospel? Our focus will be on the effectiveness of this strategy throughout southern Africa, with an emphasis on Malawi and South Africa. We will also look at case studies from around the world where sports ministry has proven effective.

1.3 The Layout

I will spend chapter 2 focusing on the social and economic conditions in Southern Africa as well as the cultural relevancy of using sports as a way of reaching the unsaved, especially the youth. In chapter 3 a great deal of time will be spent on the argument of sports ministry as being a very biblically sound way to reach people today with the message of Christ. Chapter 4 will be spent looking at the obstacles and the success stories presented together to help the reader decide if the benefits are worth the obstacles that might need to be overcome. Chapter 5 analyzes a pilot research study that we did with pastors, from several congregations in central and southern Malawi with answers concerning whether or not they are participating in sports ministry in their churches. Chapter 5 will also conclude the paper with insight and arguments as to why sub-Saharan Africa is one of the best places in the world right now to start evangelistic sport outreach programs.

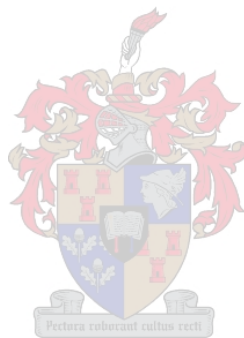
1.4 Hypothesis

If the church in Southern Africa can train its members to develop the use of sport as a ministry it will serve them with a strong evangelism and missionary tool.

1.5 Conclusion

The problem that must be overcome is the status quo. One of the biggest mistakes in missions is the failure to contextualize to the local culture where ministry is taking place. We are hoping to prove in this research that sports ministry should not only be an alternative to traditional methods but should rather become a mainstream way of reaching the lost with the Gospel in our broken world. The popularity of sports, success stories and biblical defensibility will prove that sports ministry should be adopted by mainstream missions.

Hendriks (2004:27) says... “if Christianity really wants to engage the hearts and minds of believers, it must seriously regard the context that shapes their lives and in which their communities are rooted”. In the next chapter we are attempting to look at the context of what is shaping the communities and lives of those living in southern Africa. We want to establish that southern Africa for many reasons is the right place and the right time for God to move through sports evangelism. Sports are more culturally relevant now than ever and southern Africa needs some joyful, Kingdom living now more than ever.



Chapter 2

Conclusion: Why Africa, Why Now?

There are some harsh realities that need to be looked at as one tries to understand the context of doing ministry in Africa. When one looks at the issues of poverty, AIDS, unemployment and corruption the obstacles for change seem too big to overcome. These are not the conditions that God wants for his people anywhere, not just Africa. God is a God who reaches out to the world through faith communities. Our attempt is to do our part through the culturally relevant use of sport, which will also be examined in the chapter.

Sub-Sahara Africa or southern Africa is now ripe for sports ministry as a mainstream means of communicating the Gospel. To really get a firm understanding of why sports ministry can be so effective in Africa, one must first try and understand the backdrop concerning this part of the world. The first element that must be addressed is the issue of poverty.

2.1 Poverty

Southern Africa, like much of the rest of the world, is experiencing what is known as “urban plight”. Over the past 30 years around the world about 1 billion people have moved from rural areas to the cities. In the next 10 years, another one billion people will board over laden buses and come to the cities. For most of them, the first step is into the squatter areas—great centers of darkness and demonic activity. From 1980 to 2000 the population of third-world mega-cities was projected to double from 1 billion to 2 billion people. Wherever land can be found, huts and plywood shacks will appear. Very few governments have the capacity to prevent it or serve the needs of the people arriving there (Grigg 1999: 581). In the case of Zimbabwe in 2005, the squatter areas located inside the capitol city of Harare were leveled by the President Mugabe regime and hundreds of thousands were left homeless. Some estimates say that 700,000 people were displaced.

Many Africans live in what is termed “absolute poverty”. This is a term used to describe people who have an absolute insufficiency to meet their basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter. Indeed, many of these people will eventually starve to death. Within this definition, there are many levels (Grigg 1999: 583). In the mid 1990’s, the extreme poverty line was equal to one US dollar a day and an estimated 250 million Sub-Saharan Africans landed in this category, which represented 55% of the population. The rise of global capitalism in the last 25 years has coincided with the collapse of Africa’s economies and the breakdown of most of its societies. As a result, famines, epidemics, violence, civil wars, massacres, mass exodus and political chaos are regular features of the land (Castells 1998: 82-83). The survival of most African economies has come to depend on international aid and foreign borrowing. Aid from governments and from humanitarian donors has become an essential feature of Africa’s political economy. In 1990, Africa received 30% of all aid funding in the world. For example 66% of

Mozambique's GNP is based on foreign donations (Castells 1998:88). As a result, Africa has become the most indebted area in the world. A recent survey declared that investing in Africa is a highly risky business, which should discourage even the most daring capitalists! (Castells 1998:92)

2.2 Technologically Poor

The lack of wealth and resources and the increasing number of countries becoming inescapably indebted has resulted in Africa becoming the least technologically advanced area in the world. Africa is, for the time being, mostly excluded from the information-technology revolution. Not only is Africa, by far, the least computerized region of the world, it also does not have the minimum infrastructure required to make use of the computers, thus making nonsense of many of the efforts to provide electronic equipment to countries and organizations. Truthfully, before Africa can begin to think about moving into the age of computers, they must first gain access to reliable electricity. Africa's telecommunications are meager at best, compared with current world standards. There are more telephone lines in Manhattan than in all of Sub-Sahara Africa. In 1994, Africa accounted to 2% of the world's telephone lines. In 1995, half of the countries of Africa were not connected to the Internet. In the countries that did have connection, almost all are only connected in the capitol city with the rest of the countries remained switched off. Even if the physical infrastructure was up to par, the human skills to operate the information technology remains totally inadequate. The disinformation of Africa at the dawn of the Information Age may be the most lasting wound inflicted on this continent (Castells 1998:92-95).



2.3 Unemployment

Lack of viable employment has continued the cycle from generation to generation, especially to those who have made the "urban plight" and are not sustenance farmers. Most labor in African cities is now in the categories of "irregular", "marginal self-employment", and "non-protected salary worker", all of which lead to lower incomes, lack of protection and high poverty. Even South Africa, which boasts a much better economy than any of the other southern Africa countries, still has a national unemployment rate of around 27% in 2005, accounting for about 12 million unemployed potential workers (South Africa at a Glance: 2004:183). In Malawi in 2005, it was estimated that only about 11 % of the population had wage earning jobs that did not come from sustenance farming.

2.4 Aids

AIDS has had a devastating effect on the populations and economies throughout all of Africa. Often times it is parents with young children who are dying from the disease. This

problem has left an unbelievable orphan problem throughout the continent. By the mid-1990's, Sub-Sahara Africa accounted for about 60% of the 17 million HIV-positive people in the world. In 1987 in Zambia, 24% were estimated to be HIV positive in the cities (Castells:1998: 118). There are an estimated 10 million child orphans in southern Africa that are infected by HIV. There is no doubt that poverty and economic distress in these African countries have contributed greatly to the rapid spread of HIV. Lack of adequate health care, low levels of education, unsanitary living conditions, rapid urbanization, unemployment and poverty are all factors associated with the spread of HIV. It is estimated that even in developed South Africa, that HIV will infect 27% of the population by the year 2010 (Castells 1998:121). According to www.aidsandafrica.com downloaded on November 15, 2006, the following are percentages of adults that are living with AIDS as of 2003: South Africa: 21.5%, Malawi: 14.2 %, Botswana: 37.3%, Zimbabwe: 24.6%, Namibia 21.3% and Swaziland topping all of them at 38.8%!

2.5 South Africa Challenges

South Africa has become the ultimate illegal immigrant destination in Africa because of its peace and economic stability. While South Africa is certainly a much more desirable place to live than many southern African countries, it is not without it's share of problems. According to Solomon (2000:1), The South African Army estimates that nearly 20 % of South Africa's population is made up of illegal immigrants. Most of these immigrants end up in squatter camps and are virtually unemployable. Unemployment in South Africa among the young (ages 16-24) is at about 64 %, which represented about 1 million people in 1995 (Castells 1998: 124). Cape Town and Johannesburg present some of the highest violent crime statistics in the world in rape and homicides. A recent survey in the Cape Times revealed that of the 4,409 youth surveyed (ages 12-22), 41% had been victims of crime between 2004-2005. One in seven had been assaulted and one in ten had been robbed. 29 % of those who responded know people who make a living from crime. 25 % live in a home where domestic violence is common among caregivers and parents (Cape Times, 2006).

2.6 Prisons

Crime throughout Africa is everywhere, not just in South Africa. Prisons are overcrowded in every single southern Africa country. In Malawi, prisoners will often have to sit up all night in their cell blocks because there is not enough place for them to lie down to sleep on the mats on the floor. In Kenya in 2003, there is one prison that was estimated to have the capacity to hold 14,000 prisoners that was holding 40,000 (Downloaded August 31, 2006 from Amnesty International website: 2000)! Inmates in these African prisons often suffer torture, poor nutrition, inadequate health care and a high vulnerability to the HIV/AIDS infection.

2.7 The Celebration of Sports

After reading all of the above information, one can easily see that people in Southern Africa can use some good news, fun, and something to look forward to. One can easily

see after spending a very limited amount of time in Africa that people have very little to look forward to each day. Idleness due to unemployment, imprisonment, disease, lack of transportation and many other factors are an open door for those ready to share about Christ through sport. Idleness and hopelessness for a better future is a great recipe for a successful sports ministry. We have already established the worldwide popularity of sports. People are ready to play if given some organization and equipment (as will be demonstrated in our pilot study results from Malawi) and are more than willing to hear the gospel presented to them if you have taken the time to organize an event or share your expertise through coaching. We are giving them hope for an eternal life and something to look forward to during their week through the joy of playing sports. Life is meant to be celebrated, not just endured. In his book “Celebration of Discipline”, Foster (1978:195) says this about a joyful life:

God has established a created order full of excellent and good things, and it follows naturally that as we give our attention to those things we will be happy. That is God’s appointed way to joy. If we think that we will have joy only by singing psalms and praying, we will be disillusioned. But if we fill our lives with simple good things and constantly thank God for them, we will be joyful, that is full of joy. And what about our problems? When we determine to dwell on the good and excellent things in life, we will be so full of those things that they will tend to swallow our problems.

2.8 The cultural relevancy of sports ministry

When one is contemplating starting a new ministry within the church, or as an extension arm of the church the question needs to be asked is whether or not there is a need in the church or the community that needs to be met or a niche that needs to be filled that will make the time and the effort worthwhile for a new ministry. This idea applies to all types of ministry but can specifically apply to beginning a sports ministry. Is there anything more culturally relevant today than sports that reach so many different types of people? The aspect of play is a part of every culture in the world; sports are something that can be found in a rural or urban setting, Christian or Muslim and wealthy or poor areas. Since sports are so pervasive in our culture, maybe we as the church should embrace it rather than see it as the enemy. There is a big need to recognize that sports has the capacity to accomplish some things more effectively than other means that are currently being attempted in the world of missions. What can cross cultural, race, age and economic barriers like sports can do? According to Oswald (1999:2) When Jesus taught the disciples a different time and place to fish (Luke 5:4 and John 21:6), He was demonstrating His power and authority over nature, but there is an underlying lesson that there is more than one way to catch a fish! He then calls them to be fishers of men. The Bible tells us many times that the body of Christ is a diverse body with diverse giftedness. The apostle Paul tells us that he would become a Greek to reach the Greeks or a Jew to reach the Jews. Isn’t it possible that Paul would become a coach or an athlete in order to reach that group of people?

Throughout the years in places like Cuba, Ukraine and police checkpoints/roadblocks throughout Africa I have literally seen barricades removed because the local officer looked inside the car, saw the basketball or soccer balls and with a big smile waved us through! In 1995 while playing for a Christian basketball team called the Chicago Ambassadors, we were granted visas to come and play basketball when our religious visas had been turned down by the Cuban government. We were able to minister in formal churches, house churches, youth meetings and with the teams that we competed against (one was their Olympic team!) because we were a basketball team made up of Christians who were ready and prepared to share the gospel. In the South African context, the public schools are wide open to Christian coaches who are willing to coach for free and are happy to have the coaches sharing Christ at “team time” at the end of practices.

2.9 A Look at the numbers

To really put things in perspective about the popularity of sports world-wide, one only needs to look at the sports viewing numbers from big sporting events over the last several years to realize the amazing popularity that sporting events have in our “world” culture. Consider a few of these examples:



2002 FIFA World Cup Korea/Japan (FIFA Website, See Bibliography)

As the world cup progresses towards it's climax, it has become a 24 hours a day, 7 days a week viewing phenomenon around the world. The novel experience of staging the World Cup in Asia has provided an extraordinary response from viewers in every continent. Many national audience records have been broken, in spite of non-prime-time live viewing in the Americas and in Europe. The World Cup has also become an Internet phenomenon, with FIFAworldcup.com becoming the most successful sports event website of all ever with 1.45 billion viewers logging on. Some of the notable big viewer games were:

- S. Korea vs. Italy---23.6 million viewers*
- England vs. Argentina---24 Million Viewers*
- China vs. Brazil---330 million viewers*
- Japan vs. Russia---62 million viewers*
- Brazil vs. Belgium---50 million viewers*
- Brazil vs. Germany (finals)---217 million viewers*

The following are some more large viewing numbers as reported by the Media Guardian on December 23, 2004:

European 2004 soccer finals---153 million
Olympic Games (opening ceremony in Greece)---127 million
Olympic Games (closing ceremony)---96 million
 NFL Superbowl---95 million
Monaco Grand Prix---59 million
Tour De France (final stage)---16 million
Horseracing: Grand National--- 9 million
 Rowing: University Boat Race---5 million

Here are some other interesting sports statistics that were taken from the Global Network Partner CD-ROM that was written by Rodger Oswald of Church Sports International on the cultural relevancy of ministry:

- In 1999, sports revenue was 231 billion dollars in America. That was greater than the automobile industry.
- 75% of Americans watch, read about, or participated in sports and recreation once a week, 98% do so once a month (Gallup Poll)

In 1995, there was a global research project to study the awareness of symbols. 10,000 people responded from 9 countries:

- 78 % recognized the Olympic rings
- 66 % recognized the McDonald arches
- 61% recognized the Mercedes-Benz logo
- 41 % recognized the cross
- 30 % recognized the United Nations symbol

Here are a statistics for various age groups and the percentage of that group involved in exercise or sports participation at least once a week:

- | | |
|-------------------|------|
| ▪ 12-17 years old | 72% |
| ▪ 18-24 years old | 57% |
| ▪ 25-34 years old | 48% |
| ▪ 35-44 years old | 46 % |
| ▪ 45-54 years old | 40% |
| ▪ 55-64 years old | 28% |
| ▪ 65 + | 25% |

75-80% of people who place their faith in Christ do so between the ages of 5 and 18 and this is the very age where most of the people are involved in sports. 50% of post college graduates are still involved in sports, 50% of all “Baby Boomers” are still involved and 25 % of seniors, most of whom get neglected because of their age when sports are not modified to meet their needs.

As one looks at these numbers and as South Africa is starting to get geared up for the 2010 World Cup where they will be the host country, we have every reason to believe that this world cup will be the most watched sporting event ever. Besides the television audiences, imagine the million of Africans who do not have television who will be tuning into their radios to listen to the games! According to WWW.Reuters.com, downloaded August 31, 2006:

The 2006 World Cup soccer delivered the equivalent of 64 Super Bowls during the month-long tournament, with an average TV audience of 93 million viewers for each match, about the same number who watched the NFL championship. More than 5.9 billion people watched World Cup matches live in 54 global markets, according to a final tally released on Tuesday by media buying and planning firm Initiative. About 284 million people tuned in to see Italy beat France on penalty kicks in the final on July 9, while 202 million watched the Germany-Italy semi-final and 188 million saw the other semi-final between Portugal and France. The World Cup also attracted twice the number of viewers who watched the Athens Olympics opening ceremony, solidifying its place as the top draw for broadcasters and advertisers.

So the question is, how will the church (and more specifically the church in Africa) take advantage of this cultural phenomenon?



2.10 Stewards of Our Bodies

Another aspect of the cultural relevancy is certainly the health aspect of the participants. As stewards or caretakers of our human bodies, should we not do all that we can to be as healthy as we can for as long as possible to serve Christ? Are we being faithful to the Lord when we allow preventable diseases and conditions to destroy our bodies? Would it not be nice to be able to serve God into our old age because we have done our best to maintain our health through proper nutrition and exercise programs? Part of any sports ministry needs to educate participants in the benefits of regular exercise for the glory of God's kingdom. Please see **Appendix 1** for a list of health benefits of exercise.

2.11 Case Studies in Malawi and South Africa

Here are 4 examples of how being culturally relevant through using sports has opened up many doors in Malawi and South Africa:

Illustration 1

(Khetwayo Banda, 2006. Personal email)

“As planned I met 18 college students at the famous BT Youth Center at 9:00 a.m. on Monday, May 23rd, 05. We visited Wings Of Eagle Bible College where SOM does a sports ministry and performed the following activities in the morning: singing, sketch, speeches, testimonies, self-

introductions and others. The visiting students also presented a soccer ball to Wings Bible College. It was a joyous moment! In the afternoon, we arranged a soccer game between the visitors and Wings Bible College, which unexpectedly the George Fox Students emphatically beat Wings 5-2 and the fans were full of chants of praises for the Azungu, "Azungu! Azungu! Azungu!" At the end Ben, one of the visiting Americans, preached and 15 fans accepted Jesus Christ as their LORD and Savior. In closing team leader Andrea thanked Wings Bible College for hosting them before the college's Dean Pastor Joseph Muyangata thanked the visitors for their historic visit to the college.

On the following day, 24th May, 05, we made a memorable visit to Mulanje Prison where they saw the giant and famous Mulanje Mountain from a distance but probably the most glorious time was when Ben shared the Gospel and almost the whole prison of about 1 000 inmates gave their lives to Christ! We also gave inmates soap tablets and a soccer ball. The college student's visit would be incomplete without visiting the giant of the prisons-Chichiri Prison that keeps close to 2 000 inmates. Here we also presented a soccer ball and soap tablets apart from speeches and testimonies to the group of 130 inmate Christians (100 males and 30 females), which is the target of our Sunday prison ministry.

Illustration 2

(Sam Kawale, 2006. Personal email.)

On Saturday, February 25, 2005 we held a sports day at Dzenza Secondary School. On this day, the finals of Volleyball, soccer, basketball, and netball were played. The last two weeks were great for the students as they had the much-needed entertainment.

We were told that students usually don't have things to do at the school.

It was an exciting day for the students and teachers alike as many things were achieved because of our involvement. The whole school was present on the day to see which class was going to be victorious.

Many things were achieved on this day, and here are some of them:

*Students don't usually have activities at the school, and the coming in of Sports Outreach Malawi helped provide entertainment for them.

*Students and teachers had a chance to hear the gospel, as the whole school was present. The school benefited as we donated balls for the disciplines that took place on the day

*It was noted that for the last two weeks, there was no incident reported as to misbehavior of the students. They usually have students going out drinking and coming on campus causing trouble, but this did not happen the two weeks we held sports.

The head mistress was so excited about the whole event and she asked us if we could adopt the school and develop its sports. I am thinking that we could send some more African Bible College students on Thursday outreach to help coach different sports disciplines there.

Illustration 3

(George Phiri, 2005. Personal email.)

“ Since the beginning of the basketball league that was playing along side of Sports Outreach Malawi, we have seen many people giving their lives to Christ. Many young people have simply changed their behavior by stopping their drinking, smoking and swearing at the court. Some have even started attending local churches after being persuaded at the basketball games.”

Illustration 4

(Jan Scannell, 2006. Personal email)

SCAS started in 1985 at the University of Stellenbosch as a campus ministry when a group of top sports people on campus started a bible study group, but SCAS soon spread to other university campuses and more ministry programs were added. SCAS is a faith based, interdenominational organization and serves in churches, schools and communities. SCAS makes use of their young students who serve during their “gap” year to be role models for the young athletes in the community in which they serve in various ways. Their goal is to bring hope to the children and young people in the community by fulfilling body, soul, and spiritual needs. They are serving their communities through the church, schools, and sports unions and through big sports event evangelism.

In his book “J. Hudson Taylor”, author Roger Steer (1990:92-93) writes this about Hudson Taylor:

Walter Medhurst had advised Taylor to wear Chinese clothes when traveling in the country; he himself had done so on a journey to the green teas district in 1845. Catholic priests regularly did so. Since his Yangzi journey, Taylor’s own thoughts had been moving in that direction. It wasn’t that he wanted to disguise himself—he wanted to do the Chinese the courtesy of dressing, speaking, and living like them all the time. But he knew that the merchant community would regard this as demeaning to their “superior race”—and some of the missionary communities would take a similar view. On July 27 Taylor made his big decision. He would rent a house in the country, start regular medical and evangelistic work, dress in Chinese clothes and wear the bianzi (pigtailed).

Are sports evangelists any different today? We are building bridges and meeting people where they are in their lives. In his book “ Seeker Small Groups”, Gary Poole (2003:59) says this about building bridges:

We need to challenge ourselves to break out of our holy huddles and hang out with non-Christians, rubbing shoulders with them on a regular basis. One of the

best ways to start is to identify areas of common ground that we have with non-Christians and focus on engaging in those activities together. In other words, if you enjoy playing golf and know that some of your co-workers enjoy a round every now and then, make it a point to include them instead of golfing with only with your Christian associates. Go out to eat, go to the movies, attend a sporting event or social event just as you normally would, but invite your “seeking” friends to go with you.

Most of the time in gospel accounts of Jesus, the stories are of Jesus meeting real physical needs first before addressing the spiritual needs. The Chinese people needed medical attention that Taylor could provide. That is where he was skilled and gifted. Millions of Africans today also need medical care, but not all in ministry are called to do medical work. What of those who are gifted in sports who want to serve? Those same Africans that have medical needs may also have a love for sport and lack the equipment and coaching expertise to help them become successful in sport. We can meet those needs while dressed like sportsman, just as Hudson Taylor was culturally sensitive by wearing the Chinese clothes. Taylor’s dress and medical services opened doors for him to share Christ, which is not a whole lot different for those of us involved in sports evangelism. While Taylor went with medicine, tracks and bibles; today’s sports evangelist goes with balls, cones, whistles, tracks and bibles! While with a team in Ukraine in 1996, we were invited to speak at various schools, Olympic training centers and other sports clubs based purely on the fact that we were athletes from America with matching tracksuits!

2.12 Conclusion:

There is no question of the popularity and influence of sports and the athletes who play those sports in today’s society. We Christians are called by Christ’s mandate to go unto the whole world and this means to every segment of society. Through our obedience we are to show and teach people that the Kingdom of God is already realized in Christ Jesus and that a full joyful meaningful life can begin today. As a church we have struggled to be obedient to God’s will and to try and determine what strategic action that he requires from us. So it is tragic that athletes have been overlooked when they are such a key, influential and strategic segment of society who we need to be reaching. In much of the past, traditional missionary work that has been done through the ages with un-reached people groups; chiefs, kings and heads-of-households were often targeted because of their perceived influence on the larger body around them. The idea was that if you get the top “guy” to commit or convert, the rest would follow. This made perfect sense. It is basically the same concept with athletes today. One only needs to look as far as the local high school or university today to see who are the most admired and respected people on campus. If we as Christians are to be as culturally relevant as possible in the new millennium, then we need to be on the cutting edge of how we are going to reach the lost. As we have seen in the above arguments, part of the work must be done through the use of sports and recreation.

We have now seen that the conditions are right in southern and Africa and the cultural relevancy has also been sufficiently explained so it is now time see what the bible has to say about the use of sports as a way of doing ministry. The goal of chapter 3 is to break through any objections or obstacles that some may have concerning how this type of ministry aligns itself with scripture.



Chapter 3

The Biblical Defensibility of Sports Ministry

Theology in Africa must be able to read the Christian faith tradition in the light of its present realities and then discern what God requires of it...As such the church is an interpretative community in an ongoing engagement with the remembered patterns of God's praxis. *Studying Congregations in Africa* (Hendriks 2004: 29)

For this section we applied Rodger Oswald's *Biblical Foundations of Sports Ministry* (2001). When looking at the biblical apologetic of the use of sports as a tool for ministry, one of the major obstacles involved for people who are considering this means as part of their evangelistic strategy is "what does the bible say about it?" We will discuss overcoming obstacles in chapter 4, but once the credibility of this style of ministry is established then all the other obstacles may seem very petty and superficial. Lets start with what a definition is for Sports Ministry.

Whenever the expression "sports ministry" is used there seems to be a wide diversity over the meaning of that term. There can be as many definitions as there are people that are involved in the discussion. To define the term, the first step ought to be to define the word "sports". To some the term means to imply big sports like soccer, basketball, athletics, rugby or cricket. Most people think of highly competitive team sports. The reality, however, is that sports is often used as a generic term for physical recreation or leisure activities. Therefore, sports can refer to the most basic games that even played by children. This is just simply "play" time that is basically non-productive, but free and spontaneous. So sports can refer to a recreational activity that do not have competition as an element (like camping, hiking, making crafts) or to activities that do include a competing team element like soccer, basketball, baseball and cricket. It can also individual elements like golf, tennis, swimming, archery and snow skiing.

In other words, it is important to think of a wide variety of activity when one thinks of the definition of the word "sports". Activities can be either basic and simple in nature or complex. The definition of sports ought to include men and women, senior citizens and children, the leaner and the disabled, and the highly competitive and non-competitive in a wide variety of activities. These activities can take place indoors or outdoors.

The definition becomes more complex when we place the word "sports" next to the word "ministry". Many people think that these two words are mutually exclusive and that there is no way that they should be placed next to each other. How can the two co-exist? These two words used together can be embraced if we understand and implement the basic meaning of the word ministry. In Greek, the word "minister" refers to "one who serves". In Hebrew the word for minister means basically the same thing. The root of the word means, "service". So the next question that we have to ask ourselves is "Serve whom or serve what?" The answer is that we serve God, the church and the unsaved. We can serve God when we learn that we have been created to bring glory to God and that our life is to

be a living sacrifice. (Rom 12:1) The individual can do that as a doctor, an athlete or a pastor. Individuals can serve the church when their lives are committed to using their spiritual gifts (given by the Holy Spirit) and their natural abilities to build up the body of Christ. The unsaved or the lost can be served when we as individuals will see every activity as an opportunity to model Christ and to look for opportunities to share about His grace. Often people will declare sports and recreation as superfluous or non-spiritual based on the fact that that are just merely games. The truth is that a well-conceived and well-planned sports ministry event might use a game, but the stakes are much higher than who wins and who loses the game on the field. For example, Sports Outreach Malawi organizes an annual volleyball tournament in Lilongwe, not just have a good time but because they want to minister to the some of the top athletes in the country through this event. Because “ministry” is used along side with the word “sports”, the implication is that spiritual matters are the ultimate goal of the activity or game. It seems to be fairer to judge something by the outcome rather than on preconceived and biased notions. So if people are being introduced and won to Christ and if people are growing in their faith and walk with the Lord; if people are being added to the body of Christ and getting active serving in their church, then that is neither superfluous or non-spiritual. It doesn't matter *where* something takes place, but it does matter *what* took place.

3.1 The “Call to Go”

As we try and discover the role of sports and recreation in the church, the question has to be asked, “Is there evidence of an overarching command given by God that applies to all believers?” Jesus answers that in all four Gospel accounts as well the book of Acts. Mathew 28: 19 is probably the most recognizable of all the accounts where Jesus says that disciples were to be made of all nations (people groups). In Mark 16:15 Jesus says that Gospel is to be preached to all the nations. In Luke 24:47 Jesus says that in His name that forgiveness is to be proclaimed to all the nations. As Jesus was praying in John 17, He says that He is sending his disciples into the world, just as the Father had sent Him. All one has to do to realize the importance of this subject is to look at Jesus' last words in Acts 1:8. His final spoken words to the disciples were “...and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth”. The instructions are very clear; Jesus is to be proclaimed. There is to be a testimony and a witness of Christ that goes out into the world. (Oswald 2001:2)

Who goes?

While the command of Jesus is extremely clear, the big question still remains as to who is suppose to do this? Is everyone called and gifted to “go”? This individual decision to go or not to go is often referred to as being “called”. Often times you will hear this expression of feeling “called” to go a to certain place or country by would be pastors or missionaries. But where does that leave everyone else? There is a sense where Jesus says to every believer “Follow Me...” This can be referred to as the “general” call of the person who claims that they are a Christian or a disciple of Christ. But beyond the general call the scriptures clearly communicate a personal call as well. In 2 Corinthians it speaks of the one who is called is to be an ambassador for Christ—to represent the policies of the King in every country of the world. We are all ambassadors if we say that

we are Christians. It might just be that our world that we go to happens to be very close to home. Not everyone is called to live in exotic lands far away from family and their home countries. God's call gets very specific as we start to uncover where we are gifted.

Besides the general and personal call there seems to be a specific call based on the people that God uses. As the church described in the Book of Acts was in its very early stages and was beginning to grow very rapidly, there were a number of people in a variety of areas who were called into service. Very few of these people are spiritual giants, long time leaders of the church or had any formal training in the Old Testament law. The significance that can be seen here is that each person has unique gifts, talents and abilities that make that person valuable in distinct situations. While some may be "profitable for the sake of the gospel" because they can sing, preach, or play the piano; others may be useful because they can kick a soccer ball, hit a golf ball, run fast, or shoot a basketball with great accuracy. Could it be that there is also a special call for that which creates a platform whereby the athlete has special access to other athletes because of a special skill? Is it not possible that one young athlete's talent could create opportunities to impact the millions who watch, read about and participate in sports everyday? The bottom line is that while there is a "general", "specific" and "personal" call, there is also a special and specific call on those with unique talents and abilities in the world of sports and recreation to fulfill the mandate given to us by Jesus.

God, however, never intended for the individual to operate independently. God intends for the individual to be part of a greater whole known as the "church". While the Greek word for "church" (ekklesia) refers to people who are the "called out ones", the fuller expression of this phenomenon is seen as the "local assembly" that Hebrews warns us not to forsake. As one reads the Pastoral Epistles, the ministry of the local church becomes clearer. There are many debates as to the priorities of the local church, it seems that there must be four primary functions:

1. To provide and create a vibrant corporate worship
2. To create an environment and opportunity to grow in faith
3. To fulfill the "Great Commission"/evangelism
4. To realize the Kingdom of God in a broken world

Oswald (2001:4) says this about the mandate to "go":

If the mandate to go is clear, and the means to carry out that mandate is equally clear, the issue, then, is for the church to determine a biblical pattern for carrying out the mandate. It is, at this point, that it would be wonderful to go to scripture and discover chapter and verse that clearly communicated that X Church should employ sports and recreation as a means of fulfilling the God ordained responsibilities. The problem is that chapter and verse cannot be found that condones, charges, nor advocates the use of sports and recreation as part of the church mission. Of course the Bible is equally silent on other issues, yet we find precedence by virtue of biblical principals.

For example going to the movies and watching television are not mentioned in the bible either, but there are principles that guide us as to what to watch, how much to watch, and how much to spend on what we are watching. While the bible is silent about television for example, it is not silent about the principle of a transformed mind (Rom 12:2), nor the wise use of time (Eph 5:16). By the same token there are many principles that are included in the bible that to the use of sports and recreation ministry while carrying out the commands of Christ.

3.2 PRINCIPLE OF DIVINE DIVERSITY

The God of the Bible is a multi-faceted God. He is very diverse in His essence. (He is triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit). He is diverse in His character. The Jew referred to God based on how he personally experienced Him and, therefore, called Him Jehovah Jirah – God my Provider, or Jehovah Nissi – God my Banner, the One who goes before me, or El Elyon – All mighty God. Even in the New Testament, John referred to Jesus as “the door”, “the gate”, the resurrection and the life”, “the way, the truth and the life,” and “the Good Shepherd”, all ways of communicating His diversity.

In both Testaments, there is diversity in ministry. In the Old Testament, God walked and talked with Adam, to Moses He was a burning bush; to the nation of Israel He was the pillar of fire by night and cloud by day. In the New Testament, Jesus healed, He preached to multitudes, and he disciplined the twelve. He preached to many, gently rebuked a few, and intentionally provoked others. The Holy Spirit also counsels, convicts, teaches and comforts. The point is that our amazing God works in a variety of ways. He is creative and diverse.

Gen 1:26 and 27 says that man has been created in the image of God. The Bible reveals that God is not flesh and bone (Luke 24:39), so the question is, “In what way are we like God’s image?” The answer could be that since our God is diverse and creative, His creation is blessed with that same creative spirit – some more than others, but all of creation seems to have the ability to meet and resolve problems, over-come barriers and deal with the circumstances of life in a variety of ways. We just need to learn to be as creative as our Creator.

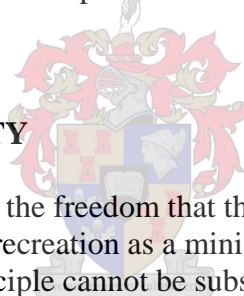
With that as the premise, it seems logical that man should try and discover the most creative ways of carrying out the mandate of Jesus. It seems that man, within the context of the church, needs to discover the most strategic method to accomplish that mandate. That creativity could turn people to sports and recreation – not because sports and recreation is so important, but because it becomes a means to build relationships with the lost. Through those relationships Jesus Christ can be lived out and proclaimed. The question should be asked, “Where do the people gather and hang out?” One of the answers is in the gymnasiums and on the fields of sports and recreation. (Oswald 2001:5)

3.3 PRINCIPLE OF HUMAN TALENTS

This principle is not to be confused with spiritual gifts. This principle refers to human gifts and abilities, those that are God-given. In Psalm 139, the psalmist is praising God for the fact that He is an omnipresent God – so omnipresent that He was even involved intimately in his birth (v. 13). The psalmist writes that God has created him as a spiritual being, as a physical being, and that God’s work was thoughtful and careful. What is implied here is that God has made each person exactly as He willed and that creation is “fearfully and wonderfully made.”

If we accept that we serve a God of order and not chaos, there is logic and purpose behind His every act ... even the granting of physical skills and ability. In Exodus 35 and 36 Moses is following the command of the Lord and having the Tabernacle of the Lord built. Those two chapters reveal that God gave the physical ability to those who were to build a dwelling place for God. God gave the craftsmanship to those who were to design and construct.

The principle is that God has blessed each person with certain physical skills and abilities and that each person participates in kingdom building when those skills and abilities are used to declare Jesus Christ. That means that when the musician plays, or the pastor preaches, or when the athlete uses his or her sport as a platform for serving the purposes of God, each is fulfilling God’s will as it pertains to His kingdom purposes. (Oswald 2001:5)



3.4 PRINCIPLE OF LIBERTY

Since this is an attempt to discover the freedom that the church has (individually or corporate) to introduce sports and recreation as a ministry tool, the principal of liberty is of utmost importance. If this principle cannot be substantiated, the church ought not consider this type of ministry.

Paul was an advocate of liberty in Jesus Christ. He, like Jesus Christ, fought against religiosity and legalism that constrained rather than freed the believer. I Corinthians 9, Paul makes his declaration of independence when he says, “Am I not free in Christ ...” He was not saying he was free to do whatever he wanted, nor free to do anything that was sinful. He was indicating that he was free from any sort of legalistic arguments or man-made rules if they interfered with the proclamation of the gospel. Paul’s driving desire was the gospel. It was so important to him that he was willing to rock the boat if it meant a greater audience for the gospel. This proclamation of freedom was so strong that he indicated he was willing to be Jewish (those under the Law) or “pagan”(those without the Law) for the sake of their salvation. In other words, Paul is saying that he is willing to be culturally relevant even if it means adapting to another culture at the expense of his own culture. He would adapt culturally for the sake of preaching the gospel. Paul went so far as to be willing to go to a specific location to reach a specific portion of his society (the philosophers on Mars Hill) in order to preach Jesus Christ. He was even unconventional enough to rent a pagan meeting place for the sake of preaching Christ.

If Paul can be that free, it is also possible that today's church can be equally free and as culturally relevant! That means the church must go to the fields of play and to the buildings that house competition and games.

Today there are those who are condemning sports and recreation ministry, not because the bible condemns it, but because man-made rules have determined that it is wrong. Paul's answer would be that he has been freed from the conventions and rules of men and that he yields to a higher set of rules ... the first is that he has been set free by grace. In other words, Paul wanted to be set free to proclaim Christ without being hindered by man-made rules.

The only question the church must ask is whether something violates the clear teaching of Scripture. There is freedom in Christ, especially in the ways that we make Christ known. In fact, if the Apostle Paul were alive today chances are he would be a musician or an athlete since those are the two universal languages of the world that would give him greatest access to large groups of people in order to proclaim Jesus Christ. (Oswald 2001:6)

3.5 PRINCIPLE OF SILENCE

Often when ministry through sports and recreation is challenged, the argument is that there is nowhere in Scripture that clearly states a church should have this type of ministry. The old idea that silence precludes the use of sports ministry is actually an argument for sports ministry.

When discussing this issue one must agree that the Bible does not promote nor indicate that a church should have a sports ministry. But on the other hand the Bible does not deny that a church should not have sports ministry. The reality is that the Bible is silent on the issue, but this silence speaks rather loudly when one carefully examines Scripture.

In dealing with the silence issue, the question must be asked, "Who wrote the Bible?" Using Scripture to answer the question, the answer is that God wrote the Bible (II Tim 3:16; II Pet 1:21). Therefore, when Paul refers to the Christian experience as running in a race, and the writer of Hebrews refers to one's life as a Christian as an endurance race, and when Paul compares Christianity to an athlete, who really wrote that – man or God? The answer is God.

Is God holy? The obvious answer is yes. Therefore, if there were something inherently evil or sinful about sports, a holy God would not have used sports or athletes as a metaphor for the Christian experience. While the Bible is silent, the use of sporting metaphors clearly indicates that God has no problem with sports as such. (Oswald 2001:7)

3.6 OTHER PRINCIPLES

There are numerous other principles that could be used. For example the principle of tithing or of stewardship could be used to go along with the principle of Human Talents. If God has given them to me, I should use them to bring glory to God! Should I not carefully take care of and utilize those things entrusted to me by God ... even the ability to hit a cricket ball or kick a rugby ball?

Another powerful principle is the Principle of Preparation. Since the Christian experience includes the process of being conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29) and this process is not completed until I die or am raptured (Phil 1:6), how is it possible to develop the character that James (James 1:2-4), Peter (1 Pet 1:6,7) and Paul (Rom 5:3-5) describe? All three seem to indicate that it is trials (problems) that will be a part of this refining process. That process is exacerbated by the fact we are all engaged in spiritual warfare (Eph 6:10-20; 1 Pet 5:8) and, like any soldier, we need to go through “boot camp”. The fields of sports competition are the training ground in secular things that the competitor might learn how to be successful in spiritual battle. (Oswald 2001:8)

3.7 CONCLUSION

While the Bible is silent on the specific issue of sports and recreation ministry, it is not silent on the call of the individual and the church to carry out the mandate of making Jesus Christ known – in our own community and, then, to the whole world. It seems we should find the most effective way of doing that without compromising any standard of holiness.

Since sports and recreation are merely games, it seems unfair to classify them as sinful or a wrong pursuit for the individual or the church. What would be wrong is if God has given us a culturally strategic means of reaching people with the gospel and we failed to utilize it because someone says “I think it is wrong” or “I think sports is sinful” or “We’ve never done this before”.

It is possible that biblical principles discussed grant the individual or the church the freedom to consider this type of ministry. The error would be to fail to implement what God has not condemned on the notion that He has. If the Bible condemns it, or if the Bible warns against it, the believer and the church should notice it and be obedient out of respect for God’s word, or as a demonstration of wisdom. However, there is not biblical condemnation; not even a suggestion of condemnation. Individuals as well as the church should feel free to use their athletic gifts as long as those gifts are used for His glory and for the Kingdom’s sake.

We have now examined the ripe, cultural climate, the relevancy and the biblical support for sports ministry in Southern Africa, so the next chapter will prepare us for possible obstacles that may occur in our quest for making sports ministry mainstream in the world of missions.

Chapter 4

From Obstacles to Success

In an effort to make sports ministry a normal evangelistic tool for the local church, the church needs to first be aware that there might be some obstacles to overcome. This chapter will deal with those issues in an effort to help empower the local faith community in its quest to reach the lost.

Using sports as a ministry can happen in the local church or it can be used as a mission's strategy when leaving one's home area or country. Whether working locally within the framework of the local church or traveling internationally, obstacles are sure to be encountered. This chapter will take a closer look at potential obstacles within the local church and with short-term mission teams that are entering the field of sports evangelism in foreign countries. This chapter will also include some encouraging success stories in overcoming some of these obstacles.

4.1 Obstacles in the local church

As we mentioned briefly in chapter 3, we will be hard pressed to find obstacles that are located in the Bible concerning the use of sports ministry. In fact where the Bible has been silent has been seen as a "green light" for a variety of many different types of ministry through the ages. Some pastors and church leaders have been misinterpreting 1st Timothy 4:7-8 for a defense of their opinion that sports should be considered "sinful".

"Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. ⁸ For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come." (Holy Bible, New International Version)

When one looks at this verse it is not meant to be critical of physical training, it is written to encourage us to keep balance in our lives with the right priorities. Anything can be sinful if it becomes an obsession and keeps us away from spending time with God. Some church leaders have used the words such as "idolatrous" when describing sports activities. This seems to be the trend in Africa more so than in Europe and America. For some reason pastors in Africa tend to think of sports as being just for kids and thus, frivolous. As long as the participants keep the game or activity in perspective, it need not become idolatrous. The activity itself is not sinful, but can become so if it approached with wrong attitudes. Let's rather use the improper attitudes as an opportunity to teach rather than to declare the activity sinful. Some church leaders will declare sports as being sinful because many people play it on Sundays. It is my opinion that this matter that is best left up to the personal discretion and conviction of the individual Christian who is involved. If one needs to make a living and support his or her family and it requires playing on Sunday, then I think worship can come in the evening or during a midweek service. If someone is in the habit of skipping church to play sports recreationally, then that is a different scenario. To some, the idea of relaxing on the Sabbath would be to play

golf on Sunday afternoon or play a couple of sets of tennis. For others, a restful Sabbath day means napping or lazing around the house all day. The Sabbath issue concerning sports should not be the stopping point in the discussion of a church starting a sports outreach program.

Some other comments that are often heard in opposition also ring hollow. Consider a few of these common objections:

- “ Sports ministry was not taught at my seminary!”
- “ Sports are a political tool!”
- “ Sports are worldly and do not belong in the church!”
- “ Sports are frivolous!”
- “ We can not afford to start a sports program!”

One of the sad but true facts is that many times churches will say no to using sports as a ministry simply because the pastor himself is not a sportsman. Often times because of being non-athletes, they have a bad perception of sports due to bad childhood or high school experiences. The following example is from an email from Rodger Oswald (2006) while on a church staff in California. This shows what can happen in the life of a church once some of these petty obstacles have been overcome:

Our church youth soccer league made every effort to reach out into the community. I learned of a small businessman who wanted his son to play in our league, but he couldn't afford the \$25 registration fee (used to offset costs of uniforms, equipment and field rental). I encouraged him to register his son as a “guest” of the league and should business turn around; he could pay the registration fee. Through conscious and careful evangelism, this man began coming to church with his wife and three sons. Fellowship with the other Christians, the preaching of the Word, corporate worship, and the devotions taught at the team's practice all were part of the process that led that man and two of his sons to place faith in Jesus Christ. After the season, the man sent me a Christmas card expressing thanks for the part the Sports Ministry had in his coming to faith. He included a check for \$500 and asked me to give other children the opportunity to be a guest in our league.

4.2 Short term missions obstacles

There are many obstacles that short- term missionaries (two week-three month trip) must overcome in order to have a successful and satisfying trip, where the gospel was shared through sport. Raising funds, using vacation time away from family, vaccination shots, malaria medicine, unusual food and water, intense physical demands, long flights and homesickness are just a few things that need to be overcome. Once while on a one month basketball missions trip to the Philippines where we played two or three games a day, I can remember reading about Paul's hardships in the book of 2nd Corinthians and thinking that I would gladly have changed places with him! The following is a good example of team in Cuba overcoming hardships to have a great ministry on the field:

Illustration 1

(Rodger Oswald, 2006. Personal email)

Our missionary baseball team (ministering in Cuba) drove overnight (for twelve hours) to get to our next game. When we arrived at our destination at 5 AM in the morning, our bed was a concrete slab next to the pig- pen. I thought the team was going to revolt. After four hours sleep, we had a team meeting to get our attitudes adjusted and went out to play a game against the town team. This team was composed of non-Christians that a church-planting pastor was trying to reach in order to start a church in this small town. After we played the game, we sat down with the team. One player shared his personal testimony, and another used the Higher Power Glove (a baseball glove made of different colors – each color representing a component of the gospel) to share the love of God through Jesus Christ. We gave the players an opportunity to receive forgiveness and eternal life by making a profession of faith in Jesus Christ. Thirteen players gave their life to Christ. (One for each hour of driving, plus one as a bonus.) This church-planting pastor now had a church. See Photo of team in **Appendix 6**.

This is another wonderful illustration of how a group of basketball players overcame the physical demands of playing 2 games a day for 2 months to help a local pastor plant churches in the Philippines. From first hand experience I know how difficult it is to minister when you have injuries, are tired and have you hands full with bad officials:

Illustration 2

(Rob Cook, 2006. Personal email)

During 1989/90 in central Philippines (western Samar) OC Int'l had conducted Pastoral Conferences as well as Church Growth Seminars. As they developed these relationships with a number of pastors, 27 of them committed to hosting and setting up a ministry outreach (basketball game and half-time program along with gospel tracts) in their community. The Sports Ambassadors team of 8 plus Dan DeVries (SA staff) played 42 games before 40,000 spectators in July/August. Over 8,000 people responded to the half-time program and gospel tracts by completing the coupon in the tract and giving it to the players after each game. These 27 pastors took these coupons/addresses and followed up over the next few months. And in the next 2 years these pastors reported at a 1992 Pastoral Conference to Eric Smith of OC International that 44 churches had been planted. (Churches = a group of believers from 8 to 100 meeting weekly.) There had been 45 churches in Samar in 1989 but by 1992 there were 89!

According to Ralph Winter (2005:8) A little understood fact about missions is that most of the people of the world are seriously alienated by groups nearby them that are ethnically different. For example, it would be better for a Norwegian missionary to come to the USA to reach the Hopi Indians in Arizona than it would be for a white citizen from Phoenix. This is simply the way it is and it is one of the most unavoidable obstacles in missions. It is easier for this author as an American citizen to go and minister in the townships in South Africa than it is for most of my white, South African friends because there is none of the cultural and historical baggage of apartheid. (See **Appendix 8**, middle photo of the Kayamandi township ministry)

At times the obstacles are already built into the countries culture. In Malawi, for instance, beer companies are often time the major sponsor for sporting events and many times they would even give out free beer to the fans which always created an unruly atmosphere in which to play. The following is a success story from the Director of African Bible College, Paul Chinchon.

Illustration 3

(Paul Chinchon 2006. Personal email)

When we formed the first ABC basketball team in 1993 there was a big debate among the students and churches in Lilongwe whether a Christian school should be playing in sports competitions at all! Basketball in particular had been sponsored by Carlsberg Beer for so long that everyone in Malawi assumed it was a very non-Christian activity. It was our original ABC Lions team with Alberto, Sam Banda, Arthur Malungu, Lotan, and Frank Chadzala – which changed that perception in Malawi. Four of those five names – Alberto Poxes, Sam, Lotan, and Frank – are really the best sports evangelism story there is. Alberto grew up playing basketball in communist Mozambique with Russian soldiers. His family had to flee Mozambique in 1987 at the height of the Mozambiquean Civil War. Alberto, his mother and 2 sisters settled in Blantyre. He only spoke Portuguese, and didn't understand a word of English or Chichewa – but people soon realized he was a great basketball player, and he soon stood out as the best player in the country. In 1988, he was awarded “Malawi Sportsman of the Year,” the first time ever that the award was given to an athlete who was not a soccer player. One of the first people to befriend Alberto when he moved to Blantyre was a young Baptist missionary from Texas named Claude Webb. Claude was also a great ball player. He hit it off with Alberto the Mozambiquean, and invited him to a Bible study. In Claude's Bible study were three other young men who had recently completed high school – Sam Banda, Frank, and Lotan. . They were all new Christians, most of them led to the Lord through Claude's involvement at the Blantyre Youth Centre Basketball Court. Claude also encouraged all four of them to attend ABC in our 2nd class of students to ever enroll at ABC.

Besides Alberto their basketball skills were lacking tremendously. Frank had hands of stone. Sam dribbled the ball off his foot more than the gym floor, and Lotan had all the courage of Dorothy's lion. But with the help of those four guys led to the Lord by Claude Webb, we not only won back-to-back championships (1995 & 1996), but we also began the first high school basketball-Bible study programs at Chipasula, St. Johns, Dzenza, SOS, Bwaila, and Likuni secondary schools. Those four guys became recognized throughout Malawi, not just for basketball, but for a great Christian witness on and off the court. Because of their influence at those secondary schools we had a steady stream of young Christian athletes apply to African Bible College for years to come. See **Appendix 5** for ABC basketball team photo.

Now, in 2006 the basketball leagues in Malawi are sponsored by Sprite rather than Carlsberg Beer. Things would not have changed had the ABC team declared that it would not be playing in the Carlsberg tournaments because they were “non-Christian” events. This is a great example of being “in the world, but not of the world”. Now African Bible College often times will host other sporting events now that it too has caught the vision of witnessing through sports. This following is from a recent event held on the campus of African Bible College:

Illustration 4

(Sam Kawale, 2006. Personal email b.)

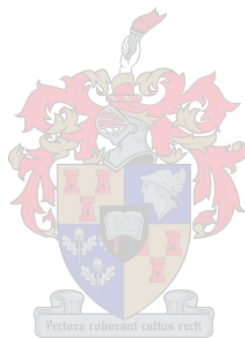
The month of November saw Sports Outreach Malawi organize what turned out to be a very successful volleyball tournament for colleges in Lilongwe. One of the remarkable things about this tournament was the manner in which we interacted with some of the college teams prior to the tournament. The “powerball” (the wordless bible built into the ball) has become my valuable asset whenever I share the word of God to sportsmen and women. I carry the ball wherever I go in case an opportunity to share arises – and believe me there’ve been lots of them. Six teams showed up for the tournament that was hosted by African Bible College. And although we had indicated in the letters of invitations that we wanted teams to bring only 12 players, we were wonderfully shocked to have an average of 18 people (players and supporters) per team. Some ABC students helped us in organizing the teams, officiating, keeping the scores, and serving minerals to the players. The games went on for the whole day and the top three teams were awarded with trophies. All in all the games were fun, very competitive and although emotions did flare at times, there was no violence or things getting out of hand. Once again we were able to give a soul-searching twenty-minute devotion to more than hundred college students assembled in the Macon gymnasium. Our devotion was strategically centered on the three basic volleyball skills namely; serving, receiving and setting. In sending His son to us, God effectively served Christ to each one of us. The onus is then on us to receive Him or not. Receiving him immediately gives us the privilege of being his sons and daughters. And after we have received Him, we want to spread him out to others like we do when setting the ball to other players on our team. Probably not the best theology but I certainly thought the illustration drove home the point.

4.3 Who in the world is “doing” sports ministry?

I believe one of the best testimonies that one can have about the success of sports ministries is true-life-stories of what is happening out there in the world. I also believe that success is also indicated by the number of people or organizations who have bought into it and are doing it as full time ministry. While the information found in **Appendix 2** is certainly not an exhaustive list of all the organizations participating in sports ministry around the world, this list does give one a sense of the scope of what is in place already worldwide.

4.4 Conclusion

As one runs into difficulties getting started in their sports ministry, the above list should be able to provide resources and contact with others who have been through many of the same obstacles and challenges and could be an excellent resource. One can also see by looking at this list that this is not a U.S based initiative that is being forced on other countries. The very fact that so many organizations are represented can only further prove that this is a world wide successful way of doing ministry. Chapter 5 studies the obstacles and success first hand through an empirical research study that was done in the central and southern regions of Malawi. The lack of resources are the biggest challenges that are being faced by the local church in Malawi, but despite many obstacles there are some great success stories from the country of Malawi.



Chapter 5

Pilot Study for Starting a Church Based Sports Ministry in Malawi

In September of 2005, Sports Outreach Malawi (SOM) hosted Rodger Oswald, the Director of Church Sports International (CSI) in the small southern Africa country of Malawi. This author is also the founder of SOM, which began its ministry in 2001. I have also been a Global Network Partner with CSI for since 2000. It is through that relationship with CSI that SOM invited Rodger to come and help train local pastors and lay leaders on how to begin sports ministry programs in their own local churches in Malawi. SOM has three employees in their ministry and a multitude of other volunteers who help organize various events around the country. While “Big Event” sports evangelism has some worth, we really wanted to get the local churches/ faith communities involved on regular basis in reaching their communities for Christ—through sports. Our four SOM workers worked diligently to organize four workshops; two in Lilongwe, one in Blantyre and one in Kasungu.

5.1 Workshop Details

The SOM workers handled all the promotion for the workshops in each location a bit differently. In all locations (with the exception of African Bible College), the participants who were invited were pastors, deacons, youth workers, lay leaders, and Christian organization leaders. In each case flyers were dropped off at churches and announcements were also made in local churches. The Evangelical Association of Malawi was also helpful in promoting the workshops. In Lilongwe there were announcements made on Radio ABC and Transworld Radio (TWR) and in Blantyre, many of the people who attended learned of the workshops through TWR.

The location of the workshops was planned as carefully as possible. We tried our best to get venues in locations where people could either walk to or get dropped off by a mini-bus as closely as possible. It also needed to be a place that was big enough to hold our projected audience; we needed electricity for our over-head projector, clean, with bathrooms and affordable, as we needed to hire the facility. We had to think about things like providing bus money to the people who attended, giving out drinks and we had tried not to teach through the lunch hour or people would be expected to be fed. Being on a limited budget, these were important things to consider. The African Bible College (ABC) workshops were easy in the sense that we just held them in the chapel after dinner and the students only had to walk their from their dormitories.

Numbers

The African Bible College had forty students who attended the workshop held on campus. We met for two nights for 1.5 hours each night.

The Lilongwe workshop was held from 9 am to noon for two days at the Calvary Family Church in “Old Town”. Drinks were provided and bus fare was also provided at the end of the second day. There were about 100 participants each day for the workshop.

The Blantyre workshop was held at the Grace Bandwe Conference Center. This workshop was held from 9-1:00 pm on Saturday. Many of the attendees joined the activities around 10:00-11:00 am, missing some of the material.

The Kasungu workshop was held in a Baptist church near the town center and was within walking distance for most of the thirty who attended. We did feed the group here since it was a small group in a much poorer and more rural community. We chose Kasungu, not for geographical strategy, but because we have an ABC graduate who helps SOM on many occasions and was a strategic way for him to get sports ministry launched in his hometown.

“The Biblical Foundations for Sports Ministry” and “How to Start a Sports Ministry Program in the Local Church” were discussed with the material being presented basically the same at all of the workshops. These topics included both theory and practical sessions on these subjects.

5.2 Questionnaire

1. On a scale of 1-10, how beneficial did you find the sports ministry workshop that was conducted by Church Sports International in September of 2005? (Did not help me at 1---Helped me a lot at 10)

The answers were overwhelmingly positive with an average of 8.9 for all of the workshops

2. Was it more possible for you to attend since the bus fare was given to you?

In many cases the participants were not given bus fare because the SOM workers decided that if they lived close enough to the meeting place that they would not receive any compensation. For those who did get compensated, the results were almost 100% yes.

3. Did you find the workshop in a convenient place to meet?

92 % of the responses were yes.

4. Did the workshop meet your expectations?

89 % of the responses were yes.

5. Have you been able to put any of the suggestions to use in starting your sports ministry program in your own church?

In Blantyre and Kasungu the answer near 50%. In Lilongwe there are 75% of the participants who have already begun putting what they learned to use in their church.

6. Did you run into any obstacles from your elders or pastors in your church that disapproved using sports as a ministry tool?

77% responded “no”. Most of the “yes” responses came from Lilongwe.

7. In the future, would you prefer a one day/ a two-day workshop?

96 % responded that they would prefer a two-day workshop.

8. Since the time of the workshop, have you networked with other pastors who attended to discuss sports ministry ideas?

54% responded “no”.

9. Do you feel like the workshops would be a better success if a Malawian who is trained in sports evangelism conducted them in Chichewa?

62 % of those in Lilongwe responded “yes”. In Blantyre it was 83% who responded “yes” and in Kasungu, the most rural of all the three locations, 91% responded “yes”.

10. Do you feel like the notes given to you on the overhead projector were sufficient for what you needed?

81 % of those in Blantyre responded “yes”, 53 % of those in Lilongwe responded “no”, and 55 % of those in Kasungu answered “no”.

11. Do you feel like we spent enough time on the “theory” aspect of sports ministry?

60 % responded “no”.

12. Do you feel like we spent enough time on the “practical” aspect of sports ministry?

49 % responded “no”.

13. Do you feel like if you were provided with all the sports equipment that you need that your church would begin a sports ministry program? How could your church sustain a ministry and self-support itself over the long term?

To the first part of the question, 91% responded “yes”. For part 2 of the question, many of the common responses were the following:

- A. By taking care of the equipment
- B. Fundraising
- C. Through the normal budget/offering
- D. Well Wishers
- E. By charging fees for leagues and tournaments
- F. Special funds through the church
- G. Special offerings
- H. Through outside contributions

14. Do you feel like sports evangelism is only a tool that can be used to reach the young people of Malawi?

This question caused much confusion because of a typographical error on the part of the author. Therefore the question was thrown out of the results.

15. What is the biggest obstacle to starting some form of sports evangelism in your church?

71 % responded that lack of equipment and resources was their biggest obstacles. Interestingly, 12% responded that there were no obstacles.

16. Does your church have a point person who would be willing to be in charge of starting a sports outreach program even if they had to do the job without getting paid?

92% responded “yes”.

17. Would you be willing to “hire/rent” equipment for a small fee if you were planning organize a big event?

93 % responded “yes” with all "no" responses coming from the Blantyre region.

18. Is your church willing to take risks to reach the lost in their community?

100% responded “yes”.

19. Do you think that church sponsored and organized sports events or leagues would be a good way to be a bridge to the community around them?

99% responded “yes”

20. If you have started a sports ministry program in your church after attending the CSI workshop in September, what degree of success have you had? What activities have you been involved in that reached the lost through sports and recreation?

37 % responded that they have not started anything yet. There was only 1 response from Kasungu of any church who has started any type of sports ministry. Of those who responded, the following are some examples of great testimonies to the effectiveness of sports ministry. Each is a response to question number 20. Each response listed below is from a different church:

- We have added netball, soccer, hockey and volleyball and a lot of people are participating. We have reached many for Christ through boys and girls soccer games.
- Many people have come to Jesus through the word of God preached during the games.
- Youth in my church are now reaching their friends through sports and many have joined the church.
- The youth are being trained to share their faith through football and many are joining the church.
- We have experienced a lot of people coming to the Kingdom of God because we have reached a multitude of people through organizing football matches. After the matches we have good deal of success leading people to Christ. Over 100 former Muslims have converted to Christianity. We have a sports ministry committee now in our church and we will soon be adding other sports to our program.
- We held a sports event in a local prison and 50 prisoners came to the Lord.
- We did one event and about half of the participants received the Lord.
- We have won 90 souls to Christ through 3 soccer teams and 3 netball teams. We will soon be adding more sports.

5.3 Data Collection

The collection of data was divided up among the three Sports Outreach Malawi workers and one SOM volunteer. The Lilongwe workers are Sam Kawale and Patrick Phiri, both paid employees of SOM and both graduates of African Bible College. Both of these guys were top students at ABC and have been working at Transworld Radio. Both are bi-lingual in English and Chichewa. In Kasungu, SOM volunteer Kenneth Mpemba translated the forms into Chichewa and the results were given back to me in English. Kenneth owns a roofing business in Kasungu, is a graduate of ABC and has helped me coach tennis in California for two summers. Kenneth has a heart for reaching the youth in his town through sports, which is why we presented a workshop in his small town. Blantyre was our largest workshop that we held hosting 200 people on a Saturday morning. Khetwayo Banda, an SOM employee and graduate of ABC administered the surveys in Blantyre, his hometown where he has served SOM in a variety of ways for five years. 41 questionnaires were collected in Blantyre, 32 in Lilongwe and 11 in Kasungu for a total of 84 responses out of a possible 370 people who attended the

workshops. Each researcher had their own technique for tracking down participants seven months after the workshops had been presented. In *Lilongwe*, Patrick Phiri used the Evangelical Association of Malawi (EAM) meeting as a place to make the announcement about the surveys and passed them out to people who had attended the workshop. He asked the participants to return the surveys to the office at the Calvary Family Church where EAM meets monthly. In *Blantyre*, Khetwayo Banda reported a wide cross section of respondents of pastors, youth leaders and elders. Khetwayo gave each respondent one month to fill out the survey before returning to pick them up at their homes, churches, ministries and schools. He answered questions concerning the survey when he later returned to receive them. With Kasungu being a smaller community, Kenneth dropped the forms with the head of a local “pastors’ fraternal” who attended the workshop. He in turn then passed them along to those that attended the workshop at their weekly meeting. Kenneth then picked up the questionnaire a week later giving them ample time to fill out the form, but was not available to answer questions concerning the form.

5.4 Survey Conclusion:

The idea of doing a follow-up questionnaire of those who attended the workshops has served a variety of purposes.

1. It will help SOM to follow up and serve those who need help in starting their own sports ministries in Lilongwe, Blantyre and Kasungu.
2. It will help SOM and CSI to get some real feedback about the effectiveness of the workshops, since that is a big part of both of those ministries. Changes in future workshops will likely be made based on the results.
3. It will help this author in his research for the effectiveness of sports evangelism in southern Africa.

We have learned that overall the workshops were helpful to many people involved in church work in Malawi. We came to some definitive conclusions concerning the importance of convenient location and bus fare on the number of people who can attend. We learned that most people would prefer the workshop in Chichewa conducted by a Malawian and that most people didn’t feel like one day was enough time to get all of the material covered. It seems like while most people are stating that equipment is the biggest obstacle, that they are willing to rent equipment for events. This is especially important to SOM, as this can be a way of generating income for their ministry. It has been realized that not only are churches not opposed to taking risks and starting new programs to reach the lost, many have already seen great success in the efforts already after a short, seven-month period.

There were also several mistakes that this author made in the process of data collection. According to A.S. De Vos (1998: 155) when questionnaires are delivered by hand there should be time for questions to be answered by researcher at the drop off time. In the case

of Kasungu and Lilongwe, there was a neutral drop off point at an office where the researcher was not present, and thus not available to explain the questions. We also failed to incorporate a cover letter (De Vos 1998:157) to explain to the participants about the purpose of the research. Some people got an explanation about what we were doing and others did not. It is also describes in the explanation of format that questions should contain only on thought. In questions number 13 and 20, we had two thoughts/questions that made things confusing to both the researcher and the sample population. I also found that while it is easier to summarize close ended questions, the information that I got from people when we asked an open ended question was much more valuable for assessing the workshops.

This study would also need to be considered a “Pilot Study” as described by (De Vos: 1998:197):

In order to undertake a scientific research on specific problem the researcher should have thorough background knowledge about it. The pilot study is one way in which a prospective researcher can orientate to the project he has in mind. Prospective researchers are often hasty to get to the main investigation and are therefore inclined to neglect the pilot study. The pilot study forms an integral part of the research process. Its function is the exact formulation of the research problem, and a tentative planning of the modus operandi and range of the investigation.

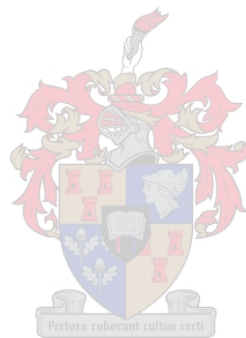
As stated earlier this information will prove to be valuable to both Sports Outreach Malawi and to Church Sports International as training through workshops is a big part of their ministry. Much more research is needed to find out what it the most valuable way to organize a training seminar, but this pilot study is a good start to reaching that goal.

5.5 Concluding Remarks

While there are many obstacles to overcome for sports to be recognized as by mainstream missions, it is this author’s discovery that whether it be physical (lack of equipment) or mental (“we have never done it that way before”) these issues can be overcome when one looks at the success of sports ministry in southern Africa and beyond. We have proven that sports ministry works, through a successful track record of Sports Outreach Malawi, Church Sports International, Sports Ambassadors and many more. Sports give the people of Africa a hope for something more than just getting by and surviving to the next day. It gives them joy and something to look forward to. As westerners we take this for granted, it is something that has always been a part of most of our lives. When we couple coaching and/or playing sports with the Gospel of Jesus Christ we have a winning combination. There could be a hope for today and hope for the future; joy now and joy later! This is such a great example of the full life one can expect from the Kingdom of God in today’s world, a life full of joy and expectation! It is my hope that more people in a position of influence in missions will implement these concepts on large scale, and it is

also my prayer that individuals who read this might just start sharing Christ in their orbit of influence. This will be a journey for me that will hopefully never end as:

“I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:14)



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