

Book Overview

Spiritualized Recreation: Mormon All-Church Athletic Tournaments and Dance Festivals surveys sports and recreational activities in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS or Mormon). It includes an introduction of the role of recreation in religious activities, an overview of activities in the LDS Church, and chapters on specific programs including basketball, softball, volleyball, tennis, golf, relay races, and dance with a special focus on the 1950s and 1960s. While the all-church athletic tournaments and dance festivals ended in 1971-1972, programs continued on a smaller scale. The final chapter explores the reasons for the change and for an increased interest since 2004.

There is no charge for accessing or downloading copies of this manuscript. Bound paper copies can be ordered from the Redd Center, 366 SWKT, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah 84602, jessie_embry@byu.edu, 801-422-4048 at cost.

A major research tool was the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies LDS Sports and Recreation Oral History Project. The Redd Center is a research center at Brigham Young University. Transcripts of the oral history are available through the L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

Chapter 1

Religion, Sports, and Recreation

The first chapter looks at the role that sports and recreation have played in religion over the centuries. It explains that many cultures saw these activities as a part of worship. While most Christian churches do not directly connect sports and religion, they use games to provide fellowship, missionary work, and reactivation. Play can even be part of the Protestant work ethic. The Roman Catholic Church and the Community of Christ (formerly the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints) provide examples of ways churches use sports and recreation.

Chapter 2

Sports and Recreation in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

The second chapter looks at the history of sports and recreation in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It surveys how church presidents from the beginning felt about the importance of recreation. It highlights the development of the program in the Mutual Improvement Association (MIA), an organization for teenagers. Finally, it explains the spiritual (testimony building, fellowshipping, overcoming the world, reactivating members, and converting nonmembers) and social goals (building character, practicing sportsmanship, and developing talents) for church activities.

Chapter 3

Basketball

The largest all-church athletic program in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was basketball. This chapter surveys the beginnings of basketball and its connections to religion. The Mormon Church adopted the game early and created a playing space in their meeting houses. The chapter then provides a history of the all-church tournament. It concludes with individual stories about basketball in the LDS Church.

Chapter 4

Softball

The second largest all-church athletic program in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was softball. Although the tournament was very similar to basketball, it was unique because church leaders declared that the priesthood and not the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Association was in charge. This chapter surveys the history of softball and then describes the all-church tournament. It concludes with individual stories about softball in the LDS Church.

Chapter 5

Other Sports and Recreation

While basketball and softball were the largest tournaments, there were other activities. Following the format of chapters 3 and 4, this chapter gives a history of the activity and then describes The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' involvement. The programs discussed are volleyball, tennis, golf, relay races, and dance. Individual stories conclude each discussion.

Chapter 6

LDS Church Youth Activities Since the 1970s

The final chapter explains the reasons for the elimination of the all-church athletic tournaments and dance festivals in 1971-1972. These include immediate concerns—church growth, abuses of the system, and officiating concerns. In addition, church leaders put increased focus on the priesthood and spiritual activities. However, sports and recreation did not disappear. This chapter explains regional activities and one-time programs. Church leaders recommended an increase of cultural and sports activities in 2004. The chapter discusses some new programs and expanded old programs.

