

Chapter 1

Religion, Sports, and Recreation

- Hopi kachina dances
- Japanese sumo wrestling
- Greek Olympic games
- Basketball

What do all these activities have in common? Disparate as they may appear, all have a connection between religion, sports, and recreation. This chapter examines the common elements to provide a setting for the Mormon athletic and cultural experience in the twentieth century. It starts with definitions of religion, sports, and recreation and then continues with a summarization of how cultures throughout history have combined religion with recreation.

Term Definitions

Sports historians, anthropologists, and sociologists have developed definitions and theories about the relationship between religion, play, and sport. Based on this research, I have come up with my own explanations for this study.

Religion

Religion is the belief and worship of a supreme being. While that appears to be a simple statement, there are many elements involved. First, religion usually (but not always) implies a faith in a superior power. Worship is an important part of religion, but members of all churches also meet together as communities to support each other and to engage in activities that are not directly related to worship.

Recreation

For most twentieth- and twenty-first century Americans, recreation is anything they do that is not work. It is a way to relax and recover from the day-to-day activities they do to earn a living. While recreation can be individual, I use the term here to refer to group activities.

Sports

Recreation includes games that could be played on a computer, watched on television or in person, or participated in through a team activity. For this study, sports refers to games that require

physical activity.

Cultures and Sports and Recreation

Through the centuries, cultures throughout the world have combined sports, recreation, and religion. Allen Guttman, a sports historian, defines sports as organized play with rules and physical activities. He concludes that some primitive societies often used these activities to impress a superior being. Carl Diem, a German athlete who started the Olympic torch relay in the 1930s, even maintains, “All physical exercises were originally cultic.”¹

Americas

American Indian examples illustrate Guttman’s and Diem’s conclusions. For centuries in North America, the Choctaws and Cherokees threw a small ball with a webbed stick into a goal. Fredrick W. Hodge’s 1907 *Handbook of American Indians* explained the activity, “The ball was a sacred object not to be touched with the hand, and has been identified as symbolizing the earth, the sun, or the moon.”² The game was “not a religion . . . [but it was] the primary mode of collective expression of Choctaw sacred ideology.” Before the game medicine men performed rituals. Then men played the game while women danced and cheered. An all-night social dance for both genders followed.³

Mexican and Central American natives also had religious games. Mayan tradition holds that twin brothers challenged the gods of the underworld to an unidentified game and lost. After the brothers were killed, the gods put one brother’s head in a tree. A young girl discovered it, became pregnant from the head’s seed, and bore sons who later defeated the gods in a second game. The Mayans played this game on ball courts near temples all the way from northern Mexico to Guatemala. The games were close enough to a religion that Spanish missionaries labeled the play as pagan and outlawed it. In their place, the missionaries introduced their non-religious sports: cockfights, bullfights, and horse races.⁴

A North American culture, the Hopis, used dance to communicate with the gods, who lived in the mountains. Several times a year Hopi men dressed as kachinas, the communicators to the gods and performed dances in which they asked the dieties for favors such as rain or a good harvest. Uncles carved dolls of these kachinas to teach their nephews and nieces about the gods and all Hopis’ dependency on the divine beings.⁵

Japan

Cultures outside the Americas also combined religion with recreation. For example, for centuries Japanese sumo wrestling, archery, and fencing all had religious elements. Fencing masters formed schools where they taught techniques they learned from the gods. Sumo wrestlers dedicated their performances to their deity and asked for divine help. The wrestlers performed at religious services and fund raisers for shrines and temples.⁶ Some festivals included dancing to ask the spirits for a good harvest.⁷

Greece

Likewise the Greeks paired sports with recreation at various celebrations. These included “athletic and equestrian competition,” music, and drama. Each festival honored a different god. The best-known celebration, the Olympic games, focused on Zeus. Historian Allen Guttman explains, “The Olympic games were sacred games, staged in a sacred place, and at a sacred festival; they were a religious act in honor of the deity. These who took part did so in order to serve the god and the prizes they won came from the god.”⁸

Commenting on Greek games, Mark Golden, a professor of classics at the University of Toronto, cautions, “There is surely something in the connection of sport and religion in ancient Greece, but . . . a lot depends on our perspective. Greek sport seems very religious in contrast with most of contemporary professional sport. It is really exceptionally so in a society in which every part of life was pervaded by cult activity and invocations of the gods. Over time, sports became more secular.”⁹ Sports, like religion and warfare, provided a way to divide the society into men and women, slaves and owners, Greek and non-Greek.¹⁰

Eric Midwinter expresses similar concerns, “There have been well meaning efforts to distinguish rites in some of the earlier athletic ventures, but the evidence is excessively frail. Quite simply, holiday crowds and a people who revered graceful physical exercise added wrestling and racing to funeral, religious and civic ceremonies.”¹¹ Allen Guttman challenges Midwinter’s conclusions. While Guttman agrees that seeing religion in all sports and recreation was an oversimplification, he blames modern society: “It is a fault of our own pervasive secularism that we tend to underestimate the cultic aspects of primitive sports.”¹²

England

Outside Greece, several centuries later, British sports started as festivals and were part of everyday life, pagan traditions, and religious holidays. For example, May Day celebrated the seasons and idolatry with folk games such as foot racing, tossing, bowling, and ball games.¹³ Scholars often see sport as a Protestant activity but argue that the Puritans opposed games. James I issued his *Declaration of Sports* or *Book of Sport* in 1618 because Puritans prevented Sunday recreation in Lancashire. He urged "lawfull (*sic*) recreation . . . such as dauncing (*sic*), either men or women, Archeries (*sic*) for men, leaping vaulting or other harmless Recreation (*sic*)." Many Puritans ignored the decree because they "saw their mission to erase all sport and play from men's lives." In 1633 when Charles I enforced James I's decree, the Puritans who controlled Parliament burned it.¹⁴ Commenting on this event, Allen Guttmann claims, "The English and American Puritans retarded the emergence of modern sports."¹⁵

Some scholars though believe the Puritans did not completely oppose games. Historian Steven Overman argues that the Puritans disapproved of the English upper class and showed their resentment by opposing recreational activities since only the rich were allowed to play games.¹⁶ The Puritans accepted "lawful sport or recreation" that was not related to the upper-class games and which "refresh[ed]" the participants. A Puritan minister declared, "We daily need some respite and diversion, without which we dull our powers; a little intermission sharpens 'em again." Or as another minister suggested, "The scope and end of all recreation is that God may be honored in and by them."¹⁷

During this same era, Charles II, "the Merry Monarch," returned the "pleasure of the stage and turf" in 1660. He enjoyed tennis, golf, archery, and boxing—the upper class sports the Puritans opposed. For example, court tennis was only for the wealthy. It could not be played by "servants or laborer[s]."¹⁸ Historian Eric Midwinter argues that sports were disliked because like modern-day television, sports and recreation were "diverting" and took people away from work.¹⁹

When Victoria became queen in 1837, she changed the old class rules for games and allowed all classes to participate in sports. During her reign, the British population grew from fourteen to twenty-one million and moved from the country into the cities. English residents had more free time and played more games. The word sport—meaning participation in an organized game—first appeared in the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 1863. Sport evolved into a "metaphor for life." Participants

argued that games taught “fortitude, self-rule and public spirit.”²⁰

Eventually sports became an important part of education. For example, in 1899 the Anglican Church opened a boys’ school in Jerusalem for the “better families” in the area. Most of the first fifteen students were Christians, but there also were Jews and Muslims. The school stressed that “a healthy body was necessary for a healthy mind; this was the backbone of the Christian gentleman.” School leaders also believed that games taught moral values and were “character-training.”²¹

United States

Like the English, American Puritans had mixed feelings about sports and recreation. In New England sports were acceptable if they were not played on Sunday and if they served a purpose. Minister Cotton Mather said, "Laudable recreation can be used for sauce but not for meat." Scholars have argued the extremes about American Puritans’ views of recreation. On one hand historians say the Puritans did not allow any recreation; on the other hand, historians insist Puritans supported games, music, theater, and dance. Some scholars suggested the clergy spoke against sports, and the government passed laws limiting activities only after people were caught doing what was preached against.²²

The Puritans were not the only Americans, however, who questioned participation in sports and recreation. In the eighteenth, nineteenth, and even twentieth centuries some churches and educational institutions discouraged sports. In 1792 the Methodist Episcopal Church declared, “We prohibit play in the strongest terms.” In 1924 the president of Yale College insisted, “To indulge a taste for playgoing means nothing more or less than the loss of that valuable treasure, the immortal soul.”²³

Value of Sports

While many British and American Protestants believed that recreation was a waste of time, others saw connections between the Protestant work ethic and play. Work, which was considered a sacred “sacrament” was an important part of English and American Protestant culture. In their view, God rewarded those who worked hard and did not waste time. As Benjamin Franklin declared, "Leisure is time for doing something useful." Some Protestants even included reading, singing, speaking, acting, and dancing as moral virtues at camp meetings and revivals. These Protestants stressed doing something rather than idling away time.²⁴

These ideas expanded during the nineteenth century. Play served a useful purpose for industrial workers by giving them social opportunities in impersonal cities. Some businesses recognized that sports united workers, served as a way to release aggressive feelings, and fostered a team spirit as workers supported a common cause. On some levels, then, sport became part of work. When recreation helped advance a goal, it became as important as work.²⁵

Americans further defined the Protestant work ethic. According to the American dream, success became proof of God's blessings. Americans saw purpose in winning—beating someone else became the goal.²⁶ Ironically, Americans were rugged individualists who wanted to be the winners, but they were also joiners. Success happened not on an individual level but also on a collective level.²⁷

In *The Influence of the Protestant Ethic on Sport and Recreation*, author Steven J. Overman identifies "seven cardinal virtues of the Protestant ethic" and then adapts them to sports.²⁸ He spends an entire book showing the correlation between these virtues. Two examples illustrate how he relates the Protestant ethic and sports. For example, Protestants generally believe in setting goals and then achieving them. Of course, the end goal is personal salvation, but that goal can best be achieved by setting smaller goals. These goals that are along the way to the final destiny help achieve the final end. Sports provide an illustration of this pattern. In sports the ultimate goal is winning the game. Players are able to win by setting smaller goals such as learning the rules and skills required to perform well and by making individual plays during the game that result in scores and eventually victory. Along the same lines, Protestants believe that they receive status in the community if they successfully fulfill their economic goals at work. Those who participate in sports also have status in the community if they make money by performing well or if the community recognizes them as part of an elite winning team.²⁹

Overman explains how these elements of the Protestant ethic were important in the nineteenth century and continued to be so in the twentieth. Studies in the 1930s and 1960s expand the relationship between virtues and sports. According to Harry Edwards' 1973 *Sociology of Sport*, Americans developed a "sports creed" which showed that sports taught desirable character qualities. For example, just as "practice makes perfect" in all aspects of life, athletes practiced to perfect skills needed to play a game and then used those skills in the actual games where the goal was to win. As

they practiced and played, men and women, boys and girls learned moral values such as the importance of working together, maintaining a strong body, and teaching fair play. Other “worthwhile character qualities” that sports helped develop were “reliance, perseverance, determination, and a willingness to abide by rules.” Social workers believe as a result of these character traits that athletes have fewer delinquency problems because of “a higher emotional stability, a higher degree of self-control and social responsibility, and . . . more resistan[ce] to the effects of failure.” A 1933 editorial expanded these ideas: “Back of the trained mind and trained body there must be that something we call character. A man possessed of the right character will use his mind to benefit society. . . . Sports are [of value] as a means of developing desirable social character traits.”³⁰

Churches and Uses of Sports and Recreation

Sports became not only a way to teach good values; it also became a way for religions to encourage young men to attend church. Until the late nineteenth century, organized religions in the United States tended to avoid sports and recreation and focused on their spiritual callings. But piety did not attract many young men to the churches. To appeal more to boys, some Protestant churches hired recreational leaders who organized games and leagues. This served two purposes—boys generally came to church or at least to the church building and avoided amusements in taverns. Social gospel Protestant churches added organized recreational activities from dances to baseball. In fact, Brooklyn, New York, churches created a Sunday School league in 1904, and the idea soon spread to other religious groups.³¹

Historian E. Brooks Holifield explained the purpose of these organized activities, “The late nineteenth century introduced new ways for congregations to realize the seventeenth-century ideal of comprehensive influence. If they could no longer comprehend a geographical region, they could still comprehend a wider spectrum of the activities of their members.” These churches no longer focused on solely worship; they provided social activities as well. From 1870 to 1950 “churches were open every day for Bible studies, sewing clubs, athletic teams, and scout troops to name a few.” According to Holifield, these congregations “substituted committees for sacraments, bazaars for confession, and a collection of functions for community.” Some ministers complained that these activities were superceding worship services. They felt that they were “running a show” where

members wanted to be “entertained” and not spiritually “edified.” But all these activities helped bring people together, “For many congregations, participation in a common quest and worship came to seem more important than doctrinal uniformity.”³² Churches justified their involvement in sports with the concept of “muscular Christianity.” Fearing that congregations were composed of a disproportionate number of women, muscular Christianity sought to attract men with strong bodies and minds.³³

There were some disagreements with the concept of muscular Christianity. For example, King Kelly of the Chicago Cubs once asked his manager A. G. Spalding, “What are you running here, a Sunday school or a baseball club?” In a sense, the answer for many churches was “a Sunday school.”³⁴ But sociologist Harry Edwards questions the value and asks whether sports always build character. He was not the first to have doubts. As early as 1928 some asked, “Why not stop talking about the noble purposes which sports fulfill and take them for what they are? . . . In short let us cease the elevations of [sport] to the level of religion.”³⁵

Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA)

Scholar Charles Page refers to churches' involvement in sports as the “basketballization of religion.”³⁶ Gradually the gymnasium became, as a history of the YMCA called it, “an adjunct of the general religious work.”³⁷ The YMCA was a Christian-based organization not affiliated with any particular sect. However, the YMCA used play to promote general Christian values. In 1844, George Williams (1821-1905) met with eleven other young men in London, England, who wanted to create a Christian atmosphere during their leisure time. Ultimately, they organized the YMCA. The idea caught on.³⁸ Boston residents formed the first American YMCA in 1851. Two years later San Francisco became the thirteenth city with a YMCA in the United States in 1853. In 1894, when Queen Victoria knighted Williams, the YMCA celebrated its Golden Jubilee. At that time twenty-four countries had five thousand associations and half a million members.³⁹

A twentieth-century history of the YMCA explains the organization provided a gathering place for young men moving to the city for employment. Or as several early American groups suggested, the YMCA united “the young men of all the Evangelical Churches for the[ir] moral, mental and religious improvement.” To do this, YMCAs formed reading rooms, prayer meetings, street preaching, and boarding arrangements.⁴⁰

The YMCA pioneered a place for sports in a religious setting by starting a small gymnasium program in the 1860s. Director Luther Halsey Gulick expanded it in the 1890s.⁴¹ He built on the theories of past YMCA directors, arguing that good physical health was essential to life. He described a triangle of the body, mind, and spirit, explaining that each was essential for well-being. "And so we have in our gymnasiums, our educational classes, our libraries' reading-rooms, and our religious work . . . a complete rounded whole." In 1901 an authority on recreation wrote in *Harper's Weekly*, "[the YMCA] deserves the gratitude of the whole country for what it has done for the physical training as well as the mental, moral, and spiritual training of our youth."⁴²

Churches and Sports, 1900-Present

Jews

Churches in general continued to use sports as a way to combine traditional and American values. Peter Levine, for example, wrote that "the children of Jewish immigrants turned sportive experiences to their own ends in ways that paid attention both to traditional Jewish communal purpose and mainstream American values." Sports were "a middle ground," combining a "significant American cultural institution to serve ethnic community ends while encouraging their own enthusiasm for full integration into American life."⁴³

Christian Churches

While many churches developed sports programs during the twentieth century, most agreed that should be a means to an end rather than the final goal. The Christian churches believed that bringing people to Christ was their major responsibility. But sports could achieve that result if it brought and kept young men at church. Sports provided ways to witness of Christ, teach character-building skills, fellowship with those with similar beliefs, and minister to the whole man—physically, socially, mentally. For example, good sportsmanship allowed participants to practice fair play, kindness, and courtesy. Likewise, their Christian virtues taught in worship could be used on the playing field or in the gym.

Shirl J. Hoffman explains in a chapter on "Sport, Play, and Leisure in the Christian Experience," "The suggestion that sport has the potential for touching our minds and emotions and spirits in ways denied us in everyday life, or that it is like art, poetry and dance can be an avenue of religious expression is radical only because of the distance we have allowed to occur between sport

and religion.” Therefore, “can sports, like religious festivals, really nourish an attitude of expectant alertness in players and spectators? Under the right conditions I believe they can.”⁴⁴

Hoffman describes some of these conditions. The goal for sports as a religious activity is not winning as it is in other places. “Athletic contests are not times for giving glory to God as much as they are the times for receiving insight from God. They are not worship but they can be occasions for seeing the greatness and goodness of God.” For example, mountain climber Frank Gabalein believed “mountain mysticism” was not “true religion,” but supported the belief that “climbing can uplift the spirit and give one a sense of greatness of God.”⁴⁵

To help promote the type of sports that Hoffman suggested, Protestant sports ministers have published manuals. Steve Connor’s *Sports Outreach: Principles and Practice for Successful Sports Ministry* (2003) explains, “Sports has the ability to build bridges in relationships and transcend cultural barriers in a world that is more and more compartmentalized.” The rest of the book then discusses how sports can be a way to bring people together by emphasizing rules, sportsmanship, and fellowship.⁴⁶

While emphasizing these ideals was the goal, it did not always happen in practice. Church leaders and members often complained that playing sports tended to bring out the worst in the participants. Baptists asked why church sports had received so many “verbal black eyes.” A popular Mormon t-shirt declared, “Church Ball: the brawl that begins with a prayer.” Why? Often those who played church ball lacked the skills to compete in school sports. Sometimes the referees/umpires did not understand the rules and could not control the games. Another concern was that as professional sports became more physical, amateurs often followed the destructive examples. Despite the negative factors, churches continued to sponsor sports and to emphasize the positive aspects because they believed the advantages outweigh the disadvantages.

A quick search on the Internet shows the variety of church-sponsored sports and the reasons why congregations support them. For example, the First Baptist Church of Clinton, Mississippi focuses on its worship services on its home page. The sports ministry’s statement of purpose declares:

“We believe that God is interested in the total person: spiritually, mentally, socially and physically. The Activity Ministry is committed to undergird, strengthen, and supplement the organizations of

the First Baptist Church through sports programs and activities, to seek to lead the lost to Christ, to reach and develop a person's relationship with Jesus Christ for the glory of God and, to provide quality leisure-time activities in a Christian setting and making new friends."⁴⁷

Those ideals are repeated on almost every sports ministry website. The Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano, Texas, explains, "Ministry is an integral part of life at Prestonwood. From praying to singing to playing sports to gathering for Bible study, there's a place for service and belonging for everyone." The sport's "mission . . . is to glorify God by introducing Jesus Christ to as many people as possible, using the vehicle of sports and fitness in order to reach out to those around us with the message of salvation in Jesus Christ. . . . Anyone is welcome to come—church membership is not a requirement."⁴⁸

Similarly, the Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago, Illinois, points out that "sports is more than a game. Our goal is to combine fun, competition, and the love of sports with opportunities to build relationships with some great people." Dave Williams, a player, explains, "I came to Willow Creek to just play basketball, but found so much more. I love the people and the competition, but more than that I've developed friendships and learned lessons that I will carry with me the rest of my life."⁴⁹

Two churches, the Roman Catholic Church and the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS), now the Community of Christ, illustrate the ways that these denominations have used sports.

Roman Catholic Church

The Roman Catholic Church emphasized sports ministries throughout the twentieth century. In 1910 *The New World*, a Catholic weekly newspaper in Chicago, started a regular sports column. Initially it was titled "Baseball and Athletics" since it focused on baseball. Within a year it became "Catholic Athletics" and reported the activities of the National Catholic Athletic Association. The newspaper offered local teams nine free baseball uniforms for every twenty-five new subscriptions to *The New World*. With all these efforts, the publication bragged that it had the largest religious baseball league in America. The next year the National Catholic Athletic Association joined the Amateur Athletic Union.⁵⁰

In addition to baseball, Catholic teams participated in soccer, track, indoor baseball,

gymnastics, wrestling, basketball, and boxing. Chicago's Bishop Bernard J. Sheil created the Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) in Chicago in the 1930s. During that decade the organization sponsored basketball, baseball, softball, golf, swimming, track, and boxing leagues and tournaments. In starting the boxing program, Sheil explained, "Kids love to fight. We'll let them fight." A 1930 Catholic pamphlet stressed productive use of new leisure time and asked "every American boy and girl, no matter what their age, [to] aspire to some skill in some sport." While other Christian churches focused on sports for men, the Catholic pamphlet explained that even though women had "less muscular constitutions" and "more delicate functions in life," sports also could help create "a healthier future for the race." As a result, Sheil included basketball and baseball/softball programs for boys and girls and men and women. The basketball program included divisions for students in Catholic schools as well as high school graduates. During the 1930s the Chicago CYO declared its national basketball tournament the largest basketball league in the country. The number of teams participating increased from 120 in 1931 to 426 in 1933.⁵¹

In 1933 the Chicago baseball/softball tournament expanded to include teams from four states including Utah. The *New World* newspaper declared that adding new teams was important because Catholic youth had been playing with non-Catholic leagues and it was important to have the church's influence in sports. A Salt Lake City priest explained that when the Salt Lake City team came to the tournament: "I wish you would stress the point that the boys are going to Chicago not so much for the idea of winning ball games but because of the support given their pastors in the development of Catholic athletes in Salt Lake."⁵²

During the 1950s and 1960s CYOs expanded throughout the United States. Dioceses and parishes continued to plan programs for Catholic youth in their area and often focused on sporting activities for young men and women. However, high-ranking Catholic Church leaders expressed concerns about sports. A 1956 pamphlet declares, "Sports have all the tingling tang of a bottle of soda pop and the intriguing suspense of a fizzling fuse." To avoid the fuse, the pamphlet recommends that participants focus on fun, friendship, strong bodies, and charity because "the matter of winning is entirely secondary."⁵³

During the 1940s and 1950s, the future Pope John Paul II also acknowledged the value of sports. He installed a swimming pool in his residence and took skiing trips to relax. He told the

Italian Olympic Committee that he and the church supported sports because of the positive impact on a person's body and soul. Sports fostered self-discipline while promoting fellowship and community. Competition encouraged participants to excel, and sports taught important life lessons. The Pope believed sports encouraged world peace by bringing people together. While championing sports, he discouraged the violent aspects.⁵⁴

In 2007 CYO websites throughout the United States stress that sports can increase participation in church activities and the practice of Christian values. However, these ideals need to be the focus and not a by-product. For example, the CYO in Quincy, Illinois (incorporated as the Catholic Youth Association in 1933) provided leagues for youth and adults. The Archdiocese of Seattle CYO (organized in 1951) also provided sports programs.⁵⁵

Community of Christ (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints)

The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS, now known as the Community of Christ) traces its beginning to Joseph Smith Jr. just as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Saints does. Followers of Joseph Smith Jr. who joined before and after his death but who did not follow Brigham Young to Utah asked Joseph Smith III, the son of Joseph Smith Jr., to head a new church in the 1860s. The RLDS Church followed other religions and included play as part of its activities during the Progressive Era. In the late 1920s and early 1930s an RLDS magazine, *Vision: A Magazine for Youth*, spelled out the reasons for involving young people in play. George Mesley, president of Our Brother's Keeper (OBK) Council explained that recreational activities were "means of building character. Any activity that does not have possibilities of making better men and women of those who participate in it is unworthy of Latter Day Saints." The article suggested music, dinners, parties, debates, service, and programs.⁵⁶

E. E. Closson, the Director of Young People, outlined activities that included classes, athletics, socials, reading clubs, drama, and music. For athletics, he encouraged "practice games in all sports followed by competition between teams representing different classes, organized leagues in basket ball (*sic*), volley ball (*sic*), baseball" and other sports. Literary and musical programs helped young people "make a public appearance and demonstrate their . . . ability. In this way talents are discovered and improved." All these activities "should be encouraged because of their intrinsic value to the individual rather than merely as a means of holding our youth to the practice of

attending the Sunday services.”⁵⁷ As the RLDS adult magazine, the *Saints’ Herald*, declared in 1937, “Youth needs to be led from the mere discussion of religion to the genuine experience of religion.”⁵⁸

To teach religious principles, the RLDS developed play programs. The RLDS leaders started a youth conference at the church’s college, Graceland, in the 1930s. A 1933 *Saints’ Herald* editorial declared: “To find so many young people devoted to the interests and program of the church—to find them such a fine clean type of young people—to listen to their conversation and to be with them for a few days—these things have brought a revelation and an experience that one would have not missed for anything.” The programs brought together young people who discovered they were more than their small congregations; they were part of a larger organization. As a result, church leaders saw “better participation of the young people in the general work of the church, a better understanding of its ideals and goals.”⁵⁹

Young people became involved in a biannual event known as the “Priesthood Institute and Youth Conference.” The RLDS First Presidency wanted the 1935 meeting to be “more than ever before a general church gathering.” The theme was “The Living Christ” and activities included classes, “discussion groups, worship services, and musical and dramatic activities.” Church leaders hoped that as time progressed “‘youth’ and ‘church’ [would] become one in a united cooperative endeavor to build the Kingdom of God.”⁶⁰ The Church held similar youth conferences in 1939 and 1941. Each year the conference was declared “the biggest and best.” Afternoon activities consisted of “informal recreation and fellowship.” Young people brought “clothes and shoes suitable for the sport” they played.⁶¹ These programs were replaced after 1941 with local instead of churchwide youth camps each year.

In the 1970s RLDS leaders added a new churchwide program. The idea originated when stakes (groups of congregations) in the Independence, Missouri, area sponsored a volleyball tournament in 1969. The event expanded in 1971, and the first annual all-stake volleyball tournament with thirty Zion League teams and two hundred fifty participants from across the United States competed. The youth who traveled to the competition stayed in members’ homes.⁶²

The stakes expanded the volleyball program again the next year and moved it to Graceland College, where participants stayed in the dorms and ate at the cafeteria. In 1973 the camp became the “Leadership, Fine Arts, and Sports” meeting. That year the First Presidency announced the

Church, rather than the stakes, would run the program in 1974. However, the leaders added that the event would not replace local youth camps, which would still be run on the stake level. If young RLDS members could attend only one camp, they should participate in the local activities.⁶³

The Graceland program continued to grow. In 1973 youth played seventy-four sports. The next year they participated in 14 major sports and 163 competitive games. According to the *Saints' Herald*, "It is believed to have been the largest gathering of senior high youth in the history of the church" with nine hundred senior high students and their leaders. The article continued that sports encouraged courtesy and recreation. But while the "outward emphasis [was] on sports, team participation, and recreation," there were also classes on leadership and arts and crafts. Church President W. Wallace Smith greeted the youth and declared it was "an event that lived up to its name: Spectacular."⁶⁴

In the twenty-first century, Spectacular continues to be a highlight for Community of Christ youth. Almost every year the *Herald* includes an article with many pictures of the event. Outstanding students receive scholarships to attend the activities at Graceland. In 1977, Celia Sherman, whose husband worked with the program, explains that sports remained a focus for the event. When asked if there was too much emphasis on sports, Sherman replied that as a parent she did not think that was possible. She sees sports as the enticement to the event. Sports also helped "develop the discipline of working together as a team or being supportive as a delegation. [Participants] soon develop a camaraderie that quickly overflows to other areas of their lives." Sherman explained that sports "may be the motivating reason for some to come." But they were "stepping stone[s] to the creative program of total involvement." The youth who took part in sports activities saw church leaders in a new light as directors and referees. She quotes a camper, "Keep up the good work. You change lives."⁶⁵

According to the November 2006 *Herald*, "Spectacular is the largest single gathering each year of Community of Christ youth and their friends—an annual celebration of fellowship, fun, and participants' relationships with each other and God." The article quotes the Community of Christ web site, "The mission of SPECTACULAR is to create a safe, Christ-centered community that encourages young women and men to discover God, their inherent worth, and cultivate and express their giftedness." The text continues, "During the week campers can look forward to sharing in all avenues

of the SPEC experience—service projects, communication workshops, basketball, musical instruction, table tennis, stage production, worship, delegation devotions, volleyball, tie-dying, cotton candy, discussions about dating and relationships, learning more about our Creator, soccer, and much, much more.” Campers participated in team volleyball for girls, boys, or co-ed, basketball for girls or boys, soccer gold/red teams for girls and boys or co-ed for green/blue teams, and co-ed softball. Individual sports were tennis, table tennis, racquetball, golf, wrestling, track, and swimming.⁶⁶

Summary

Throughout the world, many cultures have blended recreational elements into religious practice. From the ancient Greeks to modern Americans, recreation has been part of celebrations and sometimes worship. British and American societies sometimes decried the evils of recreation and then embraced it as a way to develop young people’s characters and persuade them to attend church.

In the tradition of the social congregations, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Mormons included recreation in some church activities. The next chapter introduces the role of sports and recreation in the LDS Church.

1. Allen Guttman, *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 16.
2. Allen Guttman, *A Whole New Ball Game: An Interpretation of American Sports* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 16-19. The Choctaw still play stickball but without the religious meaning. Teams now wear uniforms, there is a fixed field size, and the game is timed. Medicine men are on the sidelines, but officials on the field control the play. As Guttman summarized, "Stickball, which was once a constituent element in the tribal culture of the entire Southeast, has become a secularized ethnographical curiosity." Allen Guttman, *Sports: The First Five Millennia* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004), 11.
3. Victoria Lindsay Levine, "Music, Myth, and Medicine in the Choctaw Indian Ballgame," *Enchanting Powers: Music in the World's Religions*, Lawrence E. Sullivan, ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 189-218.
4. Guttman, *Ritual*, 16-20; Guttman, *A Whole New Ball Game*, 19-20; Guttman, *Sports*, 167-68.
5. Richard O. Clemmer, *Roads in the Sky: The Hopi Indians in a Century of Change* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 58-60.
6. Guttman, *Sports*, 44-47; Mandell, 101; Kozo Hikoyama, *Sumo, Japanese Wrestling* (Tokyo: Board of Tourist Industry, 1940).
7. Jane Marie Law, "Japanese Puppetry: From Ritual Performance to Stage Entertainment," *Religions of Japan in Practice*, George J. Tanabe, Jr., ed (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 125; Walt Disney Company, *Japan* [videorecording], 1964.
8. Louise Bruit Zaidman and Pauline Schmitt Pantel, *Religion in the Ancient Greek City*, Paul Cartledge, trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 108-110.
9. See Mark Golden, *Sport and Society in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.), ix-xi; 1-23 (quote from 23).
10. *Ibid*, 176-77.
11. Eric Midwinter, *Fair Game: Myth and Reality in Sport* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1986), 9.
12. *Ibid*, 19, 23.
13. Benjamin G. Rader, *American Sports: From the Age of Folk Games to the Age of Televised Sports* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1983), 2-4.
14. Guttman, *Ritual*, 83-84; Guttman, *A Whole New Game*, 26-27.
15. Guttman, *A Whole New Game*, 26-34.

16. Steven J. Overman, *The Influence of the Protestant Ethic on Sport and Recreation* (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate Publishing Co., 1997), 26.
17. Rader, 7.
18. Guttman, *Ritual*, 84, 24, 30.
19. Midwinter, 18-21.
20. Guttman, *Sports*, 89; Midwinter, 22-23, 30-31.
21. Inger Marie Okkenhaug, "To Give the Boys Energy, Manliness, and Self-command in Temper: The Anglican Male Ideal and St. George's School in Jerusalem, c. 1900-40," *Gender, Religion and Change in the Middle East: Two Hundred Years of History*, Inger Marie Okkenhaug and Ingrid Flakerud (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 50, 56.
22. Overman, 24, 27-31. Bruce C. Daniels argued in *Puritans at Play: Leisure and Recreation in Colonial New England* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995) that "music and theater struggle[d] for legitimacy and partner dancing was not acceptable, the Puritans enjoyed parties, fun, and pleasure."
23. Quoted in Eldon Brinley, "The Contributions of Mormon Recreation," *The Improvement Era* 48(July 1945):394.
24. Overman, 264.
25. *Ibid.*, 113-33, 67.
26. *Ibid.*, 89-95.
27. *Ibid.*, 96-101.
28. *Ibid.*, 38, 160. Overman says that the seven virtues are "worldly asceticism, rationalization, goal directedness, individualism, achieved status, the work ethic, and the time ethic." The sports adaptation became "rationalization, the work ethic, goal directedness, moral asceticism, individualism, achieved status, and competitiveness."
29. *Ibid.*, 44-48, 56-62, 193-199, 217-226.
30. Harry Edwards, *Sociology of Sport* (Homewood, IL: The Dorsey Press, 1973), 78-79, 103.
31. Radar, 106.
32. E. Brooks Holifield, "Toward a History of American Congregations," James P. Wind and James W. Lewis, eds., *American Congregations: Volume 2* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 38-47.

33. This concept is widely discussed in sports history. See for example, Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press, 2001).
34. Overman, 199.
35. Edwards, 317.
36. Overman, 144-47.
37. C. Howard Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America* (New York: Association Press, 1951), 245-46.
38. Ibid., 4-6.
39. Clifford M. Drury, *San Francisco: 100 Years by the Golden Gate, 1853-1953* (Glendale, CA: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1963), 22.
40. Jessica Elfenbein, "An Aggressive Christian Enterprise: The Baltimore YMCA's Journey to Institutional Credibility and Religious Legitimacy, 1852-1882," *Men and Women Adrift: The YMCA and the YWCA in the City*, Nina Mjagkij and Margaret Spratt, ed. (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 23-34.
41. Ibid., 260-63. Gulick was also instrumental in the Boy Scouts. He and his wife formed the Campfire Girls. See chapters 3 and 5 in this book for the stories of the invention of basketball and volleyball.
42. Hopkins, 251, 256-57, 270; Guttmann, *A Whole New Game*, 85. J. Gardner Smith, director of the YMCA in New York, expressed the role of physical activity as much the same way at a YMCA convention in 1887. He described the "four fold purpose" as physical, moral, intellect, and spiritual.
43. Quoted in Richard Ian Kimball, *Sports in Zion: Mormon Recreation, 1890-1940* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 12.
44. Shilr J. Hoffman, "Sport, Play, and Leisure in the Christian Experience," *Christianity and Leisure: Issues in a Pluralistic Society*, Paul Heintzman, Glen A. Van Anandel, and Thomas L. Visker, eds. (Sioux Center, IA: Dordt College Press, 1994), 141, 151.
45. Ibid., 152.
46. Steve Connor, *Sports Outreach: Principles and Practice for Successful Sports Ministry* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2003), 15.
47. http://www.fbccclinton.com/pages/page.asp?page_id=5058
48. <http://www.prestonwood.org?ministries>, retrieved, August 1, 2007.

49. <http://www.willowcreedk.org/sports>, retrieved August 1, 2007.
50. *New World*, March 26, 1910, 10; April 10, 1910, 8; April 16, 1910, 8; September 17, 1910, 8; January 11, 1911, 8.
51. Gerald R. Gems, "Selling Sport and Religion in American Society: Bishop Sheil and the Catholic Youth Organization," *The New American Sport History: Recent Approaches and Perspectives*, S. W. Pope, ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 300-311; David J. Lord, "Your Leisure and How to Use It" (A Queen's Work's Pamphlet, 1930), 28-29; *New World*, September 25, 1931, 8; December 4, 1941, 10; December 25, 1931, 8; February 24, 1933, 7; February 24, 1933, 10; March 31, 1933, 5-6; September 7, 1933, 11; September 8, 1933, 11; September 18, 1933, 11; November 24, 1933, 14.
52. *New World*, September 7, 1933, 11; *Ibid.*, September 8, 1933, 11; September 18, 1933, 11.
53. John M. Scott, *How to be a Christian in Sports* (St. Louis, Mo: Queen's Work, 1956).
54. Robert Fenney, *A Catholic Perspective: Physical Exercise and Sports* (Grand Rapids, MI: Aquinas Press, 1985), 60-72.
55. <http://cyoquincy.com/default.htm>; retrieved December 5, 2007; <http://www.seattlearch.org/BuildingCommunity/CatholicYouthOrganization/Athletics/>; retrieved December 5, 2007.
56. *Vision*. 454-456.
57. *Ibid.*
58. *Saints Herald*, January 23, 1937, 99.
59. *Ibid.*, June 27, 1933, 803.
60. *Ibid.*, January 8, 1935, 35.
61. *Ibid.*, March 20, 1937, 357; June 25, 1935, 805; February 27, 1937, 262; January 21, 1939, 68; March 18, 1939, 329; July 8, 1939, 841; May 10, 1941, 358.
62. *Ibid.*, October 1971, 26-27; May 1989, 27.
63. *Ibid.*, November 1973, 4, 46.
64. *Ibid.*, November 1974, 41-45.
65. *Ibid.*, November 1977, 48-51.
66. <http://www.cofchrist.com>, retrieved on August 1, 2007.