

Libertas Athletics: A Factitious Endeavor

Athletic competition is a factitious endeavor in that it mimics real life without being “real.” This is evidenced by the terms we use to describe it: we “play” a sport and competitions are called “games.” The exception is for those who derive or wish to derive their livelihood from athletic performance. While we welcome student-athletes of such high ability, our program is not intended to develop them to that level. Instead, we wish to use our athletics program to further the mission of the school:

The Mission of Libertas Christian School is to partner with parents to educate and disciple children consistent with a biblical worldview, teaching them to be lifelong learners able to discern, articulate, and defend truth in a compelling, winsome Christ-like manner.

Stating that athletics is factitious is not to say it is without value. Just the opposite is true. It is precisely because of the manufactured nature of athletics that it holds great value to a school such as Libertas. Libertas seeks to develop not just academically astute students but well-rounded young men and women who demonstrate qualities such as humility and selflessness coupled with confidence and poise. Within athletic competition, student-athletes will encounter many positive and transforming experiences which help develop and strengthen their character.

With its cheering crowds, intense competition, exhausted bodies, chaotic activity and immediate feedback, the athletic arena is a place unlike any other in the school. In athletics, the better team or player (better in the sense of greater talent or preparation) is often, but not always, rewarded with victory. Athletics reinforces the notion that harder work reaps greater rewards while also allowing for the vagaries that occur when imperfect people square off in an attempt to better one another. Such lessons and experiences may be had only within the heat of athletic competition.

The positive role of athletics is on display when students’ interest in competition and sport is used for the greater good of the team. Many students grow up loving sports and look forward to representing their school in competition. Sadly, such interest is not often found with academics. Students don’t typically dream of learning advanced biology or ancient history in high school. This results from a lack of emphasis on learning in our culture and homes. On the other hand, sports are often given too much attention as athletes serve as substitute gods and heroes for our young men and women. While we may not change the culture, we are given a great opportunity to capitalize on this interest by using it to change and develop our students into mature and godly men and women who are equipped for service and leadership to the glory of God.

For athletics to serve our students in the best possible way, the school must have a vision for what it wants to accomplish. Without such a vision, we are at risk of succumbing to the default positions often taken by sports advocates: either that competition is *only* about victories, trophies and championships (and therefore requires much time, practice and money) or it is a tool for building the self-esteem of the students (and therefore must be conducted in such a way that students are shielded from unpleasant outcomes such as humiliating defeats). Neither of these options is acceptable in a classical Christian school setting.

At Libertas, our sports program is designed to provide the student-athlete with:

- An appreciation for the care and development of one's body.
- An ability to handle pressure with confidence and poise.
- A healthy perspective on victory and defeat.
- Knowledge in how to interact with others through team sports.
- Experience in being a leader as well as a follower.
- The will to do one's best, no matter the circumstance.
- Satisfaction that comes from the exercise of creativity within recreation.
- The understanding that athletic talents and abilities, like any other talents and abilities, are gifts from God to be developed and exercised for His Glory, not our own.
- A sense of belonging to something greater than oneself, be it a team or a community.
- A test of one's ability as well as the encouragement to reach beyond perceived limits.
- The discipline that requires one to set a goal, work toward it and see it to completion.

When we lose sight of the fact that athletics is artificial, we risk misleading our student-athletes. When athletics is "real", too much emphasis is placed on the outcome. The desire for victory can become so great that we lose sight of any benefit our student-athletes may gain in defeat. When athletics is "real", sinful behavior is easily justified. The poor call by a referee or cheating by an opponent may be seen as a wrong that in the name of justice must be addressed, often boorishly. To counter these tendencies, we must train not only the student-athletes but the parents, coaches and administrators in a healthy perspective on competition and give each clear expectations for conduct on the field, court, sideline and stands.

This is not to say that we want our students to enjoy defeat or become passive doormats after every blown call or incident of cheating. Such a response is to replace one set of weaknesses (blown temper, profanity or ugly remarks) with another (giving up, quitting or resignation with defeat). Both responses, while typical, are overcome through mature coaching and parenting that seeks to move student-athletes toward strength of spirit, body and mind.