Sport, Religion, Faith and Spirituality: An Annotated Bibliography

Youth Sport and Spirituality: Catholic Perspectives
by Patrick Kelly SJ
University of Notre Dame Press - 2015

Unsportsmanlike behavior by student athletes or parents at youth sporting events happens with regularity these days. Much recent research reveals that young people are dropping out of sport at alarming rates due to the often toxic elements in the culture of youth sports. The timely, innovative essays in Youth Sport and Spirituality present a wide-ranging overview that draws on resources from Catholic spiritual and theological traditions to address problems such as these, as well as opportunities in youth sport in the United States.

The book consists of two sections. In the first, prominent scholars in philosophy, psychology, theology, and spirituality reflect on how youth sport contributes to the integral development of the person and his or her grasp of spiritual values. The second half of the book consists of chapters written by coaches, athletic directors, and specialists working with youth coaches. These practitioners share how their approaches to working with youth in sport contribute to the integral development of their players and their openness to transcendent values.

Holy Goals for Body and Soul: Eight Steps to Connect Sports with God and Faith
Thomas J. Paprocki
Ave Maria Press - 2013

Hockey-playing Catholic bishop Thomas J. Paprocki has a message for teens and young adults: athletics and fitness provide daily ways to connect with God. Bishop Paprocki weaves his unique personal story with eight athletic topics and connects them with a path to wholeness.

Holy Goals for Body and Soul links lessons from the world of sports and fitness--especially the experiences of a Catholic bishop who plays ice hockey--with concrete ways to live a holy life. In Bishop Paprocki’s view, everyone is called to holiness, which can be encountered anywhere: "I encounter holiness while training for a marathon. I encounter holiness during a workout at the health club." He explores eight sports-related topics to help the reader navigate a life of holiness:

Sport and Christianity: A Sign of the Times in the Light of Faith
Edited by Kevin Lixey, LC, Christoph Hübenthal, Dietmar Mieth, and Norbert Müller (eds.)
Catholic University of America Press – 2012

In response to the call of popes and the Second Vatican Council to read the signs of the times, Sport and Christianity explores the connections between these two seemingly disparate phenomena. It reflects on what the fascination for sport reveals about the human person and to what degree sporting activities are compatible with, and can even advance, the church’s mission. The book discusses the attitude toward sports presented in the Old and New Testaments and in the writings of the church fathers. This leads naturally to a study of Christian anthropology, the relationship between God and man, as well as the connection between the body and the soul.
There is an extensive look at sports as viewed by recent popes, including Pope Pius XII—who denounced the use of drugs in sports as early as 1955—as well as Pope John Paul II, and Pope Benedict XVI. The editors pose provocative questions, such as what is Christian about sport, and how can we make sport more Christian?

_Catholic Perspectives on Sports: From Medieval to Modern Times_
by Patrick Kelly SJ
Paulist Press - 2012

This book is about how Catholics have engaged in play and sport from the medieval period to the 20th century in the United States, and how this engagement has been related to theological and spiritual sensibilities. Fr. Kelly persuasively challenges the commonly held view of sport historians that Christians prior to the Reformation "loathed the flesh," and therefore did not take play and sport seriously. On the contrary, he argues, Christians in the early church and medieval period insisted on the goodness of the material world and that the person is a unity of body and soul. Christians during these periods also insisted that virtue has to do with moderation. A virtuous person, according to this view, should be moderate in his studies or work and take time to engage in play and recreation. Some theologians, such as Thomas Aquinas, thought play was closely related to spiritual values.

Fr. Kelly shows how during the medieval period Catholics participated in games and sports on feast days and Sundays and depicted such activities in prayer books and on woodcuts and stained glass windows in churches and cathedrals. Catholic humanists during the Renaissance included time for play and sport in the first schools which educated primarily lay people, and the Jesuits followed their lead in subsequent centuries. Catholics brought these cultural traditions with them to the United States, where they engaged in play and sport routinely and without anxiety and incorporated them in their schools as a matter of course.

_Living the Eucharist through Sports: A Guide for Catholic Athletes, Coaches, and Fans_
by James Penrice
Alba House - 2009

This is my body, which will be given up for you. With these words Jesus proclaims his ultimate mission, and changes bread and wine into his body and blood to be our food and drink for eternal life. Those words central to our identity as Catholics also express the mission of everyone who plays a sport. Athletes sacrifice their body and all that dwells within mind, spirit and will for the good of someone and something beyond themselves. As people of the Eucharist, Catholic athletes make this sacrifice not only in imitation of Christ, but truly in him and through him as branches of his Eucharistic vine. Sports are thus a profound way to live the Eucharist. This book will help athletes reflect on their sport as a vocation that draws them into a deeper sense of discipleship. The Mass, Eucharistic adoration, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, prayer, the Rosary, the liturgy year, humility, suffering, and what it means to be a member of the Body of Christ are among the topics covered, all from an athletic perspective. Each chapter concludes with questions for individual reflection or group discussion, as a resource for personal and communal growth. Finally, the presentation of Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati as the perfect model and mentor for athletes provides a fitting conclusion to a very practical look at the relationship between sports and the living of one’s faith.
**The Catholic Ideal: Exercise and Sports**  
by Robert Feeney  
Aquinas Press - 2007

This book is a new and spiritual way of looking at exercise and sports. It offers a sound philosophy of sport with insights from St. Thomas Aquinas on exercise. This book is easily the best and most thorough volume on the subject. Illustrated with 50 photos of Olympic greats, John Paul II, Pier Giorgio Frassati and others.

**Spirituality of Sport: Balancing Body and Soul**  
by Susan Saint Sing  
St. Anthony Messenger Press - 2004

*Spirituality of Sport* focuses on the energy of a benevolent God that humans experience as joy and the impetus to play, dance and compete. In exploring and developing a healthy spirituality for body and soul, Saint Sing tells many personal anecdotes and those of her fellow athletes and coaches. She discusses briefly the history of play and sport, from the ancients to such moderns as Michael Jordan, including St. Francis’ own play. She describes spiritual and religious trends and reaction to sport and play, the ideal of a balanced person (body, spirit and soul) and connection to the inner athlete, ethical values for Christians engaged in sports, a model of play as energy that is archetypal in nature. She offers sports visualization techniques in the form of prayer and positive reinforcement of the body image.

**Champions of Faith: Catholic Sports Heroes Tell Their Stories**  
by Thomas A. O'Toole  
Rowman & Littlefield - 2001

An engaging collection of faith stories of well-known Catholic athletes from a wide spectrum of sports...each story contains wonderful insights into the personality, successes, and struggles of the athlete.

Descriptions used in this bibliography are adapted from Amazon Books.

To make a recommendation for additions to this list, contact christopher.janosik@villanova.edu.