Dear friends of the Italian Swimming Federation and athletes competing for the “Sette Colli” Swimming Trophy in Rome.

I thank the president of the Federation for his words introducing our meeting.

These are days of joy and enthusiasm for you and for the sports fans who support you, because sport is also a celebration. A celebration not without content, as it transmits values that are increasingly necessary in a society like ours, which is defined as “fluid”, without firm points of reference. Your sport is performed in water, but it is not “fluid”; rather, it is very “solid” as it requires constant commitment and fortitude.

For this familiarity that you have with water, I like to remember the words of St. Francis of Assisi: “Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water, which is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.”

Your challenge to yourselves, competing, living in contact with water, can also be a contribution to a different culture of water: water is life, without water life does not exist. And talking about life means talking about God, origin and wellspring of life, and also our Christian life begins with the sign of water, with Baptism.

The water in which you swim, dive, play, and compete, requires several forms of attention: the value of the body, which must be cared for and not idolized; the need for interiority and the search for meaning in what you do; the strength and courage to resist fatigue; the clear vision of which port to look for in life and how to reach it; and the value of authenticity, which means transparency, clarity, inner cleanliness.

In contact with water, you learn to be repelled by anything that is polluting, in sport and in life.

Dear managers and athletes, I thank you for your visit. I wish you every good to your activity, your families, and your plans. May the Lord bless you and always give you the joy of participating in sport together in a brotherly spirit.

[Original Text: Italian - Courtesy of the Vatican Press Office]
Dear Friends,

I am pleased to greet you, the members and directors of the American Pro Football Hall of Fame, and to welcome you to the Vatican. As many of you know, I am an avid follower of “football”, but where I come from, the game is played very differently!

I thank Mr. Anderson for his gracious words of introduction, which stressed the traditional values of sportsmanship that you seek to embody, both on the field and in your own lives, your families and your communities. Our world, and especially our young people, need models, persons who show us how to bring out the best in ourselves, to use our God-given gifts and talents, and, in so doing, to point the way to a better future for our societies.

Teamwork, fair play and the pursuit of personal excellence are the values – in the religious sense, we can say virtues – that have guided your own commitment on the field. Yet these same values are urgently needed off the field, on all levels of our life as a community. They are the values that help build a culture of encounter, in which we anticipate and meet the needs of our brothers and sisters, and combat the exaggerated individualism, indifference and injustice that hold us back from living as one human family.

How greatly our world needs this culture of encounter!

Dear friends, I pray that your visit to the Eternal City will increase your gratitude for the many gifts you have received and inspire you to share them ever more generously in shaping a more fraternal world.

Upon you and your families I invoke God’s blessings of joy and peace. May God bless you all!

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Dear Friends,

I am happy to meet with you on the eve of the final match of the “Coppa Italia.” I thank the President of the Italian Soccer Game Federation for his kind words, and I congratulate the two teams, Juventus and Lazio, that, in addition to reaching the finals, are greatly loved by sports people. This commits you even more to witness the genuine values of sport.

Therefore, I wish to return briefly with you on the importance of sport in our time. Considering the fascination and effect that professional soccer has on persons, especially on young people, you have a notable responsibility. Those who are considered “champions” become easily reference figures. Therefore, every contest is a test of balance, of self-control, of observance of the rules. One who with his behavior is able to give proof of all this, becomes an example for his admirers. It is what I wish for each one of you: to be witnesses of loyalty, of honesty, of harmony and of humanity.

Unfortunately, sometimes in stadiums there are violent episodes, which disturb the serene unfolding of the matches and the healthy recreation of the people. I hope that, to the degree that it is in your power, you will always be able to help the sports endeavor and remain as such and, thanks to the personal commitment of all, to be a motive of cohesion between sports persons and the whole society. I thank you from my heart for your visit and I hope you will have a truly good match! I invoke upon you, upon your families and upon dear persons the Lord’s blessing. And I ask you, please, to pray for me.

Original text: Italian - Translation by Zenit, Virginia M. Forrester

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Opening Address by Pope Francis  
October 5, 2016

Dear brothers and sisters,

I am delighted to greet you, protagonists of the world of sport, together with the Authorities and the delegates of other religious communities, who have come to the Vatican to show, as the title of the international Conference suggests, the valuable service that sport offers to humanity. I greet you all and thank you. In particular, I greet Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, President of the Pontifical Council for Culture; Mr. Ban Ki-moon, the Secretary General of the United Nations; and Mr. Thomas Bach, the President of the International Olympic Committee.

Sport is a human activity of great value, able to enrich people’s lives; it is enjoyed by men and women of every nation, ethnic group and religious belonging. During these last few months, we have seen how the Olympic and Paralympic Games have been at the centre of attention of the whole world. The Olympic motto “altius, citius, fortius” (faster, higher, stronger) is an invitation to develop the talents that God has given us. When we see athletes giving their very best, sport fills us with enthusiasm, with a sense of marvel, and it makes us almost feel proud. There is great beauty in the harmony of certain movements and in the power of teamwork. When it is like this, sport transcends the level of pure physicality and takes us into the arena of the spirit and even of mystery. And these moments are accompanied by great joy and satisfaction, which we all can share, even those not competing.

Another important characteristic of sport is that it is not just for high performance athletes. There is also sport for pleasure, for amateurs, for recreation, not aimed at competition, but allowing all to improve their health and wellbeing, to learn to be a part of a team, knowing how to win and also how to lose. This is why it is important to participate in sporting activities, and I am happy that at the centre of your reflections these days there is the commitment to ensure that sport is always more inclusive and that its benefits are truly accessible to all.

Our religious traditions share the commitment to ensure the respect for the dignity of every human being. So it is good to know that the world’s sporting institutions have taken so courageously to heart the value of inclusion. The Paralympic movement and other sporting associations sustaining those with disabilities, such as the Special Olympics, have had a decisive role in helping the public recognise and admire the extraordinary performances of athletes with different abilities and capacities. These events present us with experiences in which the greatness and purity of sporting gestures stand out clearly.
But in this moment I am also thinking about those many children and the youth who live at the edges of society. Everybody is aware of the enthusiasm with which children will play with a rugged old deflated ball in the suburbs of some great cities or the streets of small towns. I wish to encourage all of you – institutions, sporting societies, educational and social organisations, religious communities – to work together to ensure these children can take up sport in circumstances of dignity, especially those who are excluded due to poverty. I am pleased to know that present at the conference are the founders of the Homeless Cup and other foundations that, through sport, offer the most disadvantaged a possibility of integral human development.

I desire to point out also a task and a challenge for you, representatives of sport and of the businesses that sponsor sporting events. The challenge is that of maintaining the honesty of sport, of protecting it from the manipulations and commercial abuse. It would be sad for sport and for humanity if people were unable to trust in the truth of sporting results, or if cynicism and disenchantment were to drown out enthusiasm or joyful and disinterested participation. In sport, as in life, competing for the result is important, but playing well and fairly is even more important! Don't forget, none of us should forget, that beautiful word that describes true sport: amateur sport.

I thank all of you, then, for your efforts to uproot every form of corruption and manipulation. I know there is a campaign underway led by the United Nations to fight against the cancer of corruption in all areas of society. When people strive to create a society that is fairer and transparent, they collaborate with the work of God. We too, responsible for different religious communities, wish to offer our contribution for that commitment. As far as the Catholic Church is concerned, she is working in the world of sport to bring the joy of the Gospel, the inclusive and unconditional love of God for all human beings.

I trust that these days of meeting and reflection will allow you to explore further the good that sport and faith can bring to our societies. I entrust to God all that you do, every hope and expectation, and from my heart invoke his blessing on each one of you; and I ask you, please, to pray for me. Thank you.
ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO A DELEGATION OF ATHLETES OF "SPECIAL OLYMPICS ITALIA"

Clementine Hall
Friday, 19 June 2015

Dear Friends,

Welcome, and thank you for wanting this meeting before the World Games in Los Angeles, in which you will participate at the end of July. I hope you have a wonderful adventure!

The world of sport is usually regarded by the Church with trust and attention, because she knows that together it is possible to work to bring back to sport its true meaning: an educational, playful, recreational sense; and also its cultural and social dignity. You know it well, you who have chosen sport as an experience of promotion and growth, in the presence of a condition of frailty and limitation. Indeed, the plan of Special Olympics includes — by its Charter — people with different abilities to improve their quality of life.

It is beautiful and significant that children and adults find in sports training and in participating in even international competitions an incentive to live their life to the fullest. It is surely a challenge. And you have accepted it and you have “taken the field”! I encourage you to remain committed to helping one another discover your potential and to love life, to appreciate it with all its limitations and especially in all its beauty. Never forget beauty: the beauty of life, the beauty of sport, that beauty which God has given us. Sport is a very suitable path for this discovery, to open ourselves, to go outside of our own walls and get in the game. This is how we learn to participate, to overcome, to struggle together. And all this helps us to become active members of society and also of the Church; and it helps society itself and the Church to overcome all forms of discrimination and exclusion.
Please, remain loyal to this ideal of sport! Do not let yourselves be “infected” by the false culture of sport, that of economic success, of victory at all cost, of individualism. It is important to rediscover “amateur” sport, the one without pay, sport for the sake of sport. Sport must instead be safeguarded and protected as an experience of human values, of competition yes, but in loyalty, in solidarity. Dignity for every person: always! Let no one feel excluded from playing sport. And to achieve this objective it takes generous action and agreement of the various institutional and social organizations.

I hope you experience the upcoming World Championships in a joyful, enthusiastic, peaceful way. Have fun and make beautiful friendships with brothers and sisters from around the world! Upon each one of you, on your family members and on those who are accompanying you in this sporting adventure I invoke the Lord’s blessing. And you, please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.

[Blessing]
MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE LAITY
ON THE OCCASION OF THE INTERNATIONAL STUDY SEMINAR
“COACHES: EDUCATING PEOPLE”

To my Venerable Brother Cardinal
Stanislaw Rylko
President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity

I address my cordial greeting to you and to all those attending the International Seminar to study the theme “Coaches: educators of people”, organized by the Church and Sport section of the Pontifical Council for the Laity. By following your journey of reflection and promotion of human and Christian values of sports, in this fourth Seminar you have opportunely taken into consideration the figure of the coach, placing emphasis on his or her role as educator, both in the professional or amateur sphere.

All of us, in life, need educators, mature, wise and balanced people who help us to grow in the family, in our studies, in work and in faith. Educators who encourage us to take the first steps in a new activity without being afraid of the obstacles and challenges to be faced; who spur us to overcome difficult moments; who exhort us to have trust in ourselves and in our teammates; who are beside us both in times of disappointment and of failure, and in those of joy and success. Indeed, the athletic coach too, especially in the Catholic environment of amateur sport, can become for so many kids and young people, very important for the development of a mature, harmonious and complete person.

The presence of a good educator-coach is providentially revealed especially in the years of adolescence and early youth, when the personality is actively developing and seeking models to refer to and identify with; when one strongly feels a need for the appreciation and esteem not only of one’s peers but also of adults; when, in following bad examples and in seeking false happiness, the danger of floundering is increasingly real. In this delicate phase of life, great responsibility lies with a coach, who often has the privilege of spending hours a week with young people and of
having great influence on them through his or her behaviour and personality. The influence of educators, especially on young people, depends more on who they are as persons and on how they live than on what they say. Thus, how important it is for a coach to be an example of integrity, coherence, of right judgement and impartiality, but also of *joie de vivre*, patience, capacity for respect, and of benevolence toward everyone, especially the most disadvantaged! How important it is for a coach to be an example of faith! Indeed, faith always helps us to lift our gaze to God, so as not to absolutize our activities, including sports, be they amateur or competitive, and therefore to have the right objectivity and the wisdom to relativize both defeats and successes. Faith gives us that gaze of goodness on others, which enables us to overcome the temptation of excessive rivalry and aggression, makes us understand the dignity of each person, even of the less gifted and disadvantaged. Coaches, in this sense, can make such a valuable contribution to the creation of a climate of solidarity and inclusion with regard to young people who are marginalized and at risk for social reasons, finding the appropriate ways and means to draw them too to participate in sport and to experiences of socialization. A coach with human and spiritual balance will also know how to preserve the authentic values of a sport and its fundamental nature as a game and as a socializing activity, preventing it from degenerating under the increasingly intrusive pressure from so many interests today, especially economic.

Next to parents, teachers, priests and catechists, a coach can therefore be an effective formator of young people. Every good formator must receive a solid formation. It is necessary to form formators. That is why it is important that your seminar recall all the organizations operating in the field of sport, national and international federations, lay and ecclesial athletic associations, to pay due attention and to invest the necessary resources for the professional, human and spiritual formation of coaches. How beautiful it would be if in all sports, and at all levels, from large international competitions to the tournaments in parish recreation centres, young people could encounter in their coaches authentic witnesses of life and of faith lived!

I pray the Lord, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, that your work in these days may bear abundant fruit for the pastoral care of sport, and that it continue to promote Christian holiness in this environment too, in which so many young lives can be reached and transformed by joyous witnesses of the Gospel. I ask you to please pray for me, and with affection I bless you.

*From the Vatican, 14 May 2015*

*Feast of St Matthias the Apostle*

Francis
ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO MEMBERS OF THE ITALIAN TENNIS FEDERATION

Paul VI Audience Hall
Friday, 8 May 2015

Dear Brothers and Sisters, good morning!

I thank you for coming, and in such numbers! I thank the President for his courteous words. A special greeting goes to the children present -- there are so many! -- who are taking part in a [ludic-motor] project organized by the Italian Tennis Federation.

On several occasions I have talked of sport as an educational experience. Today I wish to confirm it: sport is an educational path! There are three paths, three fundamental pillars for children, for youngsters and young people: school and family education, sport and work – school and family education, sport and work. One grows well on these three pillars! When all three are there, school, sport and work, then the conditions exist to develop a full and genuine life, thus avoiding those dependencies that poison and ruin one’s existence.

The Church is interested in sport because man is at her heart, the whole man, and she recognizes that sports activity affects the formation, relations and spirituality of a person.

You, athletes, have a mission to fulfill: to be able to be, for those who admire you, valid models to imitate. And you also, sports directors, trainers and workers, are called to give good witness of human values, masters of a sports practice that is always loyal and limpid.

Yours is a very competitive sport, but the pressure to be able to obtain significant results must never drive you to take a short cut as happens in the case of doping. How awful and sterile is that victory that is obtained cheating the rules and deceiving others!

The Apostle Paul uses the example of an athlete to illustrate an important characteristic of human existence and he says this: “Do you know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it!” (1 Corinthians 9:24). In a certain sense, this is your daily experience in tennis. However, Saint Paul is referring to the challenge of giving an ultimate meaning to life itself. Therefore, I would like to exhort each one of you to get involved not only in sport -- as you already do and with optimum results --, but in life, in the search for the good, the true good, without fear, with courage and enthusiasm. Get involved with others and with God, giving the best of yourselves, spending your life for what really is worthwhile and lasts forever. Put your talents at the service of the encounter between persons, of friendship, of inclusion.

Dear brothers and sisters, I ask you to take my greetings to your families and friends. May Almighty God bless you and protect you always and, please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.

Now we will all pray together to Our Lady before giving you the blessing. (Hail Mary)
 ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO MEMBERS OF THE SPORTING ASSOCIATION OF LAZIO

Paul VI Audience Hall
Thursday, 7 May 2015

Friends of the Lazio Sports Society, good morning and welcome!

I greet you cordially. I thank the President General for the kind expressions he addressed to me in the name of the directors, the athletes, the sportsmen, the sympathizers and your families. In these 115 years of life, your multi-sports Society made an effort to keep alive the ideals that characterized the origins. In 1900, in fact, a group of young people took the initiative to create a sports society that would be accessible to youths of the people and that would hand down the moral and ethical values of sport. At that time organized sport was the prerogative of wealthy persons. The intent of that founding group was to spread it to all levels and all the social categories. I encourage you, therefore, to continue to be hospitable and to value the different talents. May your Sports Society always be an open house, where fraternity and harmony between persons can be experienced without discrimination.

Your moral and sports patrimony is expressed symbolically in a Latin motto, used by Sallustio: “Concordia parvae res crescunt, discordia maxime dilabuntur.” It would be interesting to ask the translation to one of your boys ... But better not! In reality, it isn’t difficult ... The motto says this: “In concord little things grow, in discord the greatest decline.” It’s beautiful! Your long history has confirmed this ancient sentence: born as a small track reality, in the course of the years Lazio has been enriched by different associated activities and is articulated in numerous sports sections. They enjoy the adherence of many members, athletes and supporters of all ages, united among themselves by the common Olympic spirit and the desire of reciprocal solidarity. And a merit of the Lazio multi-sport Society is that of having worked to give equal dignity to
all the sports. In Italy, as well as in my country, in Argentina, there is the risk of always speaking of soccer and neglecting the other sports. Instead, every sports discipline has its own value, not only physical or social, but also moral, in as much as it offers the possibility to persons, especially youngsters and young people, to grow in balance, in self-control, in sacrifice and in loyalty to others. And I want to stress the latter: loyalty! -- loyalty to others. The habit of betrayal is growing somewhat everywhere: “This doesn’t suit me, I put it to one side.” Loyalty! Sports make this grow so much.

The Bible teaches us that the human person is one whole, spirit and body. Therefore, I encourage you to always cultivate, together with sports activity, and athletics, the religious and spiritual dimension. Sometimes it happens that a boy or a girl, to train and compete, misses Mass, catechesis. But this isn’t a good sign! It means that the scale of values has been lost. As also study, friendships and service to the poor must not be neglected. These things must not be neglected to do only one thing. No! Everything together -- thank God we have good examples of sports men and women, also great champions, who have never stopped living the faith and service to their neighbor. In reality, true sport fosters the building of a more fraternal and solidaristic world, contributing to the surmounting of situations of injustice and of human and social hardship.

While I congratulate your Sports Society for its long and useful activity, I exhort you to continue on this path of service to the aggregation of young people and of families. I invoke upon you and upon you dear ones the maternal protection of Mary and I bless you affectionately.

Now I ask the Lord to bless all of you.

(Blessing)

Thank you so much!

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Dear Friends of the CONI,

I address my cordial greeting to all of you, and I thank the President for his gracious words. In our era, sport is right at home in the Church, and this meeting proves it: we are celebrating together your centenary, an important anniversary for Italian sport. For 100 years the Italian National Olympic Committee has promoted, organized, led sport in Italy, not only with regard to great world events such as the Olympics, but also by enhancing its popular, social, educational and cultural aspects. It does so by drawing inspiration from the fundamental principles of the Olympic Charter, which, among its main principles, poses the centrality of the person, the harmonious development of humankind, the defense of human dignity, and also that of contributing “to building a peaceful and better world, without war or tension, by educating youth through sport practised without discrimination of any kind... with a spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play (International Olympic Committee, Olympic Charter, n. 6).

Sport has always favoured universality characterized by fraternity and friendship among peoples, understanding and peace among nations, out of respect, tolerance, harmony of differences. Every sporting event, especially those of the Olympics, where representatives of nations with histories, cultures, traditions, faiths and different values meet, can become a channel of an ideal force capable of opening new and sometimes unexpected paths in the resolution of conflicts arising from human rights violations.

The Olympic motto — “Citius, altius, fortius” — is not an incitement to the supremacy of one nation over another, of one people over another, or even of the exclusion of the weakest and least protected. But it represents the challenge to which we are all called, not only the athletes: that of taking on the toil, the sacrifice, to reach life’s important goals, accepting one’s limitations without
allowing oneself to be impeded by them but striving to excel.

I invite you to persevere on this path. I encourage the educational work you are doing in schools, as well as that in the world of work, and that of solidarity, in order to foster sport accessible to all, attentive to the weakest and the most vulnerable strata of society; sport inclusive of people with varying disabilities, of foreigners, of those who live on the outskirts and who need places to meet, socialize, share and play; sport not aimed at profit but at development of the human person, in an open manner.

I know that the CONI, first, increasingly imitated by other National Committees, has welcomed the position of Olympic Chaplain into its organization. It is a friendly presence who seeks to make manifest the closeness of the Church as well as to stimulate a strong sense of spiritual competitiveness in sport enthusiasts. There are indeed several words in the vernacular of sport which refer to spiritual life. This was even understood by the Saints who knew how to explain passion, enthusiasm, perseverance, determination, challenge and limitation with the gaze projected toward the other, beyond oneself toward the horizon of God. St Paul invites us to train “in godliness;... for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come” (1 Tim 4:8).

Dear friends, I wish you all good things for your service. Best wishes also for Rome’s candidacy to host the 2024 Olympic Games. I won’t be here! May the Lord bless all of you and your families. Please remember to pray for me. Happy Christmas!
ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS TO THE ATHLETES OF THE
ITALIAN PARALYMPIC COMMITTEE

Vatican's Paul VI Hall
Saturday, October 4th 2014

Dear Athletes, Dear Friends, good morning!

I thank you for your presence -- so numerous and festive! --, and I thank the President of the Italian Paralympic Committee for his courteous words.

You have come from so many parts of the world, and each one of you bears in him/herself the experience of sport and, first of all, of man and of woman: you carry the victories, the goals reached with so much effort, also with the many difficulties you had to face. However, each one of you is a witness of how important it is to live these joys and efforts in your encounter with others, to be able to share your “course,” to find a group of friends who give you a hand and where you give a hand to others. And thus each one succeeds in giving the best of him/herself!

Sport promotes contacts and relations with persons who come from different cultures and environments. It helps us to live by accepting differences, to make of these a precious occasion of mutual enrichment and discovery. Above all, sport becomes a precious occasion to recognize one another as brothers and sisters on the way, to foster the culture of inclusion and to reject the disposable culture.

All this goes back in the main to your experience, because the disability you experience in some aspect of your physique, through the practice of sport and healthy competition, is transformed into a message of encouragement for all those who live situations similar to yours, and becomes an invitation to commit all one’s energies to
do good things together, surmounting the barriers we might meet around us, and first of all those that are within us.

Your witness, dear athletes, is a great sign of hope. It is proof of the fact that in every person there are potentialities that at times they do not imagine, and which can be developed with confidence and solidarity. God the Father is the first to know this! God knows your hearts perfectly: He knows everything. He is the first to know this! He knows us better than anyone else, and He looks at us with confidence, He loves us as we are, but He makes us grow in keeping with what we can become. Thus, in your effort for sport without barriers, for a world without excluded persons, you are never alone! God Our Father is with you!

May sport, therefore, be for all a gymnasium in which to train daily in respect of yourselves and of others, a gymnasium that gives you the occasion to know new persons and environments and that helps you to feel yourselves an active part of society. May you be able to experience, also through the practice of sport, the closeness of God and the friendship of brothers and sisters.

I thank you for this meeting. I bless you all and your dear ones. And, please, remember to pray for me! Thank you!

Now I ask the Lord to bless you all, to bless your whole life, to bless your path, to bless your hearts.

FRANCIS PP.
Good evening,

I’m glad you have come together for such a symbolic match. It is a match which highlights the union of the teams, and the union of spectators watching, and everyone’s desire, which is for peace. It is a match where no one plays for himself, nor for one another, but for all. And thus each one grows. And by playing as a team each one grows as a person, grows as a people, becomes greater. And by playing as a team, the competition, instead of being a war, is the seed of peace. For this reason the symbol for this match is the olive tree. I greet, in a special way, the members of Scholas, who have cooperated in the organization of this match, and who will plant the olive tree of peace. I invite all of you to plant it together with Scholas. I apologize for speaking in Spanish, but it is the language of my heart, and today I wish to speak to you from the heart.

Thank you.

FRANCIS PP.

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Dear Friends, good evening!

I am delighted to meet with you on the occasion of the Interreligious Match for Peace in which you will play tonight at Rome’s Olympic Stadium. I thank you for readily fulfilling my wish to see champions and coaches from various countries and religions compete in a sporting event to bear witness to the feelings of brotherhood and friendship. My special thanks go to the people and organizations that have contributed to the realization of this event. I am thinking especially of “Scholas Occurrentes” which is part of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, and the “PUPI Foundation”.

The game this evening will certainly be an opportunity to raise funds in support of solidarity projects, but it will be above all an opportunity to reflect on the universal values that football and sports in general can foster: loyalty, sharing, acceptance, dialogue, trust in others. These are values common to every person regardless of race, culture and religious creed. Indeed, tonight’s sporting event is a highly symbolic gesture to help one understand that it is possible to build a culture of encounter and a world of peace, where believers of different religions, while preserving their own identity — for when I said “regardless” this did not mean “setting aside”, no. Believers of different religions, while preserving their own identity, can coexist in harmony and mutual respect.

We all know that sport, especially football, is a human and social phenomenon of great importance, one that has an impact on contemporary customs and mindsets. People, especially young people, look to you with admiration for your athletic abilities. It is important to set a good example both on and off the field. In sports competitions you are called to demonstrate that sport which expresses the joy of life, of games, is a celebration, and as such it must be appreciated through the recovery of its gratuitousness, its capacity to foster the bonds of friendship and strengthen openness between people. Also with your daily
behaviour, full of faith and spirituality, humanity and altruism, you can render testimony to
the ideals of peaceful civil and social coexistence, for the edification of a civilization
founded on love, on solidarity and on peace. And this is the culture of encounter: working
for this.

May the football match tonight revive in those who are taking part the awareness of
the need to commit oneself so that sports may contribute effectively and fruitfully to the
peaceful coexistence of all peoples, excluding any discrimination of race, language and
religion. You know that discrimination can be synonymous with scorn. Discrimination is a
form of scorn, and you, with this game tonight, will say ‘no’ to every kind of discrimination.
Religions in particular are called to be vehicles of peace and never hatred, for in the name of
God one needs to bear love, always and only. Religion and sports, understood in this
authentic way, can work together and offer to all of society eloquent signs of the new era in
which “nation shall not lift up sword against nation” (cf. Is 2:4).

On such a unique and meaningful occasion as this match tonight, I want to deliver
this message to all of you: expand your hearts as brothers to brothers! This is one of the
secrets of life: to expand our hearts as brothers to brothers, and that is also the deepest and
most authentic aspect of sports.

Thank you.

FRANCIS PP.

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Dear Friends,

It is with great joy that I address you, lovers of football, on the occasion of the opening of the 2014 World Cup in Brazil. I would like to send a cordial greeting to the organizers and the participants; to every athlete and every fan, as well as to all the spectators who will follow this event in stadiums and on television, the radio and internet, an event which crosses language, cultural and national barriers.

My hope is that, more than a celebration of sport, this World Cup can be a celebration of solidarity among nations. This, however, presupposes that the football matches should be considered as what they really are: a game and, at the same time, an opportunity for dialogue, understanding and mutual enrichment of the human person. Sport is not only a form of entertainment, but also — and I would say above all — a tool to communicate values which promote the good of the human person and contribute to building a more peaceful and fraternal society. Just think of loyalty, perseverance, friendship, sharing, solidarity. There are, in fact, many values and attitudes which football promotes and which prove to be important not only on the field but in all fields of existence, and specifically in building peace. Sport is a school of peace; it teaches us how to build peace.

In this sense, I would like to point out three lessons for practicing sports, three fundamental attitudes for the cause of peace: the need to “train”, fair play and respect for the opponent. First, sports teach us that it is necessary to train in order to win. In this practice of sports, we can see a metaphor for life. In life it is necessary “to train”, to strive to achieve important results. The spirit of sports becomes an image for the necessary sacrifices in order to grow in the virtues that are necessary for the character of a person. For a person to improve, extensive and consistent “training” is necessary, and much more is needed to achieve an encounter and peace between “improved” peoples! It’s necessary “to train” a lot...
Football can and should be a school for building a “culture of encounter” which allows for peace and harmony among peoples. And here the second lesson of the practice of sports comes to our aid: we learn what fair play in football has to teach us. When we play on a team we must first think of the good of the group, and not of ourselves. In order to win, we must overcome individualism, selfishness, all forms of racism, of intolerance and of the instrumentalization of the human person. It is not only in football that being fominha [individualistic and egoistic] is an obstacle to positive results for the team. Because, in life, when we are fominhas, ignoring those who surround us, the entire society is damaged.

The final lesson for sports which bear the fruits of peace is the respect deserved by our opponents. The secret to winning on the field, and also in life, is to respect my teammates and also my opponent. No one wins by himself, not on the field or in life! May no one isolate themselves or feel excluded! Be careful! No segregation, no racism! And if it is true that at the end of the tournament only one national team will win the Cup, likewise, it is also true that, by learning the lessons that sports teach us, we will all be winners, strengthening the bonds that tie us together.

Dear friends, I express my thanks for the opportunity which was given to me to address these words to you on this occasion — especially to the President of Brazil, Ms Dilma Rousseff, whom I greet — and I promise to pray so that heavenly blessings are not lacking for everyone. May this World Cup take place in complete serenity and tranquility, always with mutual respect, with solidarity and with fraternity between men and women, who recognize each other as one family. Thank you!
ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS TO MEMBERS OF THE SPORTS ASSOCIATIONS FOR THE 70th ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOUNDATION OF THE CSI (ITALIAN SPORTS CENTER)

Saint Peter's Square
Saturday, 7 June 2014

Dear Friends from the Italian Sports Centre!

I thank you for your presence — there are so many of you! — and I thank the President for his kind words. It is a real sports festival that we are celebrating here together in St Peter’s Square, which today is also serving as playing fields. And it is a very good thing that, instead of being alone, you wanted to celebrate your 70th birthday with the entire Italian sports world represented by CONI [Italian National Olympic Committee], and especially with the many sports associations. Congratulations! Now the only thing missing to celebrate the 70th birthday is a cake!

The biggest greeting goes to you, dear athletes, coaches and managers of the sports clubs. I am aware of and appreciate your commitment and your dedication to promoting sports as an educational experience. You, young people and adults working with the little ones, are, through your precious service, teachers in every respect. This is a cause for just pride and it is especially a responsibility! Sports are a means for education. I find there are three paths for young people, for children and little ones. The path of education, the path of sports and the path of work, when there are jobs for young people to start with! If there are these three paths, I assure you there wouldn’t be dependencies: no drugs, no alcohol! Why? Because school leads you forward, sports leads you forward and work leads you forward. Don’t forget this. To you, sportsmen, to you, managers, and also to you, men and women working in politics: education, sports and job opportunities!

It is important, dear boys and girls, that sports remain a game! Only by remaining a game will it do good for the body and spirit. And as sportsmen, I invite you not only to play, like you already do, but there is something more: challenge yourself in the game of life like you are in the game of sports. Challenge yourself in the quest for good, in both Church and society, without fear, with courage and enthusiasm. Get involved with others and with God; Don’t settle for a mediocre “tie”, give it your best, spend your life on what really matters and lasts forever. Don’t settle for lukewarm lives, “mediocre even-scored” lives: no, no! Go forward, seek victory, always!
In sports clubs one learns how to accept. One accepts every athlete who wishes to join, they accept one another with simplicity and kindness. I invite all managers and coaches to be, above all, accepting people, capable of holding the door open to give each one, especially the least fortunate, an opportunity to express himself.

And you, boys and girls, who experience joy when you receive your jerseys, the sign of belonging to your team, you are called to behave like true athletes, worthy of the jerseys you wear. I hope you can merit them everyday through your commitment as well as your hard work.

I also hope you can taste the beauty of teamwork, which is so important in life. No individualism! No to playing for yourselves. In my homeland, when a player does this, we say: “This guy wants to devour the ball all by himself!”. No, this is individualism: don’t devour the ball, be team players. To belong to a sports club means to reject every form of selfishness and isolation, it is an opportunity to encounter and be with others, to help one another, to compete in mutual esteem and to grow in brotherhood.

Many teachers, priests and sisters began using sports as a way of bringing their mission as Christians and as human beings to fruition. I recall, in particular, a wonderful example of a priest, Fr Lorenzo Massa, who gathered groups of young people from the streets of Buenos Aires in a parish field and gave life to what would become a major football team.

Many of your sports clubs were born and still live “in the shadow of the Church steeple”, or in the oratories, with priests and sisters. It’s beautiful when a parish has a sports club; something is missing without one. If there is no sports club, something is missing. Yet a sports club like this needs to be well executed, in a way that’s consistent with the Christian community. If it isn’t consistent, better not to have one! Sports in a community can be an optimal missionary tool, where the Church comes close to each person and helps him or her to excel and to encounter Jesus Christ.

All the best, then, to the Italian Sports Centre on its 70th anniversary! And best wishes to all of you! I heard before that you made me your captain: thank you. As captain I spur you not to close yourselves on the defence: don’t lock yourselves into the defensive, but go on the offense, play together for our team, which is that of the Gospel.

I recommend that everyone get to play, not just the best, but everyone, with the advantages and the limitations that each has, indeed, focusing on the disadvantaged,
as Jesus did. And I encourage you to carry on with your commitment through sports for children from the outskirts of cities; in addition to footballs, you can give them reasons for hope and trust. Always remember these three paths: school, sports and job opportunities. Seek this always. And I assure that this road won’t lead to drug or alcohol dependencies and other vices.

Dear brothers and sisters, we are at the eve of Pentecost: I invoke upon you an abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit. May he by his gifts sustain you on your journey and make you joyful and courageous witnesses of the Risen Jesus. I bless you and pray for you, and I ask you to pray for me, because I too play in my own game, which is your game, it is the game of the whole Church! Pray for me that I can play this game until the day the Lord calls me to himself. Thank you.

*At the end of the encounter, the Holy Father said:*

Now let us say a prayer in silence, everyone. Each of you think of your teams, your fellow players, your coaches, your families. And let us pray to Our Lady that she may bless us all: *Hail Mary*...
Dear Friends, welcome!

This meeting has “expanded” a little. In addition to the Fiorentina and Napoli teams — finalists in the Italian Cup — present are also the senior executives of the Football Federation and of the Serie A League. I thank you for this visit and also for its expansion! It seems to me that you have a responsibility, a responsibility to society. In Italy, as in Argentina and other countries, football is a factor in society. Football is a social event and it demands social responsibility on the part of football players both on and off the field as well as from the national and local managers.

As a boy I went to the stadium a number of times and I have fond memories of it. I went by myself and with my family. They were joyful moments on a Sunday spent together with my family. I would hope that football and all other popular sports can take back that element of celebration. Today football also operates within the world of business, marketing, television, etc. But the economic aspect must not prevail over that of the sport; it risks contaminating everything on the international, national, and even local level. Therefore, those at the top must react in a positive way, by restoring athletic dignity to these events. This is also your important responsibility as football players. You are the centre of attention, and many of your fans are young, very young people. Keep this in mind, remember that your actions resonate for better or for worse. May you always be true athletes!

Sport possesses a strong educational value in the growth of a person: personal growth with a balanced mind and spirit, and social growth in solidarity, loyalty and respect. May football continue to develop this potential! I wish you all the best in your work, and that tomorrow be a great celebration of sports! This is my wish for you. Thank you.

FRANCIS PP.

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ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS
TO MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN OLYMPIC COMMITTEE

Clementine Hall
Saturday, 23 November 2013

Dear Members of the European Olympic Committee, Good morning!

I am delighted to welcome you on the occasion of your Assembly. In particular, I greet your President and the President of the International Committee, and I thank them for their words. Through you, I would like to express my appreciation to all those who, at the European level, are committed to fostering human development and social brotherhood through sports.

The bond between the Church and the world of sports is a beautiful reality that has strengthened over time, for the Ecclesial Community sees in sports a powerful instrument for the integral growth of the human person. Engaging in sports, in fact, rouses us to go beyond ourselves and our own self interests in a healthy way; it trains the spirit in sacrifice and, if it is organized well, it fosters loyalty in interpersonal relations, friendship, and respect for rules. It is important that those involved at the various levels of sports promote human and religious values which form the foundation of a just and fraternal society. This is possible because the language of sports is universal; it extends across borders, language, race, religion and ideology; it possesses the capacity to unite people, together, by fostering dialogue and acceptance. This is a very valuable resource!

I wish to encourage institutions and organizations like your own to propose, especially to the younger generations, sports initiatives as a formation for peace, sharing and coexistence among peoples. Sporting events are characterized by unity and not division! Build bridges, not walls. The five interlocking rings, the symbol and standard of the Olympic Games, are meant precisely to represent the spirit of brotherhood that must characterize the Olympics and competitive sports in general.

When sports is considered only within economic parameters or for the sake of victory at any cost, one runs the risk of reducing athletes to mere merchandise for the increasing of profit. These same athletes enter into a system that sweeps them away, they lose the true meaning of their activity, the joy of playing that attracted them as children and that inspired them to make many real sacrifices and become champions. Sport is harmony, but if the excessive quest for money and success prevails, that harmony is broken.

You, as Olympic officials, are called to foster the role of education in sports. Let us all be aware of the great necessity to form athletes in righteousness, moral rigor and a keen sense of responsibility.
I express to you all my sincere best wishes for your work and I invoke the Lord’s blessing upon you, your families and those who will take part in the next Olympic Games and in your other initiatives. Thank you.

Now I would like to give to you all, to all those whom you represent, and to the whole of the sports world, to those preparing for the next Olympic Games, the Lord’s blessing. For all of us, may it be a blessing full of grace and full of love. Let each of us pray to the Lord asking him for this blessing. May the Lord bless you and protect you. Amen!

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Dear Friends, Good morning,

I am pleased to see that various sporting events are being held between Italy and Argentina! This is good, it is a good sign, a sign also of a great tradition that continues between these two nations.

I thank you for coming to greet me with the help of the Ambassador and I also thank you for your charitable initiative.

Rugby is a very nice sport, and I am saying this because this is how I see it: it is a tough sport, there is body contact but there is no violence, there is great loyalty and great respect. Playing rugby is tiring, no es un paseo, it is not a leisurely walk! And I think this is useful to temper the character, the strength of willpower.

Another aspect that stands out is the balance between the group and the individual. There are the famous “scrum(s)” that are at times shocking! The two teams engage, two compact teams push together against each other and balance each other out. And then there are individual moves, the sprints to score a try. That’s it, in rugby you run towards the “goal”! Such a beautiful word, so important. It makes us think about life, because our whole life moves toward a goal; and this search — the search for the goal — is strenuous, it demands a struggle, commitment. And it is important not to run alone! In order to arrive you must run together: the ball is passed from hand to hand and you move forward together until you reach the goal. Then you celebrate!

Perhaps my interpretation is not very technical but it is the way a bishop understands rugby! And as a bishop, I hope you put all of this into practice even off the pitch, practicing it in your lives.

I pray for you, I wish you the best. Pray also for me so that I too along with my coworkers may make a good team and may reach the goal!

Thank you and may you have a great match tomorrow!
ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS TO DELEGATIONS OF THE NATIONAL FOOTBALL TEAMS OF ARGENTINA AND ITALY

Clementine Hall
Tuesday, 13 August 2013

Dear Argentinian Friends, Dear Italian Friends,

I thank you for this visit on the occasion of the friendly match between the national football teams of Italy and Argentina. It will be a little difficult for me to be a fan but fortunately it is a friendly match... and may it truly be so, I count on you!

I thank the staff of the Italian Football Federation and those of the Argentine Federation. I greet the players of both national teams.

You, dear players, are very popular: people follow you very closely and not only on the field but also off it. This is a social responsibility! Let me explain: during the game, when you are out on the pitch, you display beauty, generosity and camaraderie. If a match lacks these qualities it looses force, even if the team wins. There is no room for individualism; team coordination is paramount. Perhaps these three qualities: beauty, generosity and camaraderie can be summed up in a sports term that we must not forget: "amateur," enthusiast. It is true that national and international organizations professionalize sport, and it should be this way. But this professional dimension must never push aside the initial vocation of an athlete or team: be amateurs. When an athlete, even a professional one, cultivates this dimension of being an "amateur", society benefits and that person strengthens the common good with the values of generosity, camaraderie and beauty.

And this leads you to the awareness that before being champions, you are men, human beings with your merits and defects, with a heart and ideas, hopes and problems. And so, even though you are famous, you must always remain men in sports and in life. Men, heralds of humanity.

I would like to encourage you staff members, in your work. Sports are important but they must be true sports! Football, like some other disciplines, has become big business! Work to prevent it losing its character as a sport. May you also promote this enthusiastic attitude of "amateurs" that, for its part, definitively eliminates the risk of discrimination. When teams follow this path, the stadium is enriched with human qualities, violence disappears and families will return to the stands.

I remember that as children we went as a family to Gasómetro Stadium, father, mother and kids. We of course returned home happy, especially during the
championship of 1946! Who knows if one of you will score a goal like Pontoni? What do you say? I greet in a special way the Argentine directors and players! Thank you for the visit, so special for me. I ask you all to live sport as a gift from God, an opportunity to make good use of your talents but this is also a responsibility. Dear players, I would like especially to call to mind that with your conduct, both on and off the pitch, in life you are a point of reference. Last Sunday I chatted on the telephone with some young people of a group, who wanted to greet me, and I spoke to them for half an hour and naturally their preferred topic of conversation was tomorrow's match. They spoke of some of you and they said: "No, I like him for this and this reason or that". You are an example, a reference point. The good you do is impressive. With your conduct, the way you play, your values, you do good people watch you, take advantage of this to sow goodness. Even if you do not realize it, for many people who watch you with admiration, you are a role model for better or for worse. Be aware of this and be an example of loyalty, respect and altruism. You are also builders of concord and social peace of which are all in such great need. You are a point of reference for many young people and a living model of real values. I have faith in all the good that you can do among boys and girls.

Dear friends, I pray for you, that you may carry out this most noble vocation of sport. I ask the Lord to bless you and the Virgin Mary to keep you. And I ask you to please pray for me so that, I too, on the "pitch" on which God has placed me, may play an honest and courageous game for the good of all. Thank you.

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