



Immaculate Heart of Mary School Virtue in Sports Program



An Athlete's Prayer

God,

Let me play well, but fairly.

Let competition make me strong, but never hostile.

Forbid me to rejoice in the adversity of others.

See me not when I am cheered,

But when I bend down to help my opponent up.

If I know victory, allow me to be happy.

If I am denied, keep me from envy.

Remind me that sports are just games.

Help me to learn something that matters once the game is over.

And if through athletics I get to be an example

Let it be a good one.

Amen.

The objective of any sport is to win. But while the objective of the game is to win, the purpose of the game is to become what we were created to be.

Many recent Catholic and Christian voices, including Pope Pius XII, Pope Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis, have all commented on the importance of sport and its authentic purpose: the good of the human person.

They have each noted that the prominence of sport in the culture has made it a "new areopagus," a reference to Saint Paul's preaching to the people of Athens in Acts 17. In

other words, sport is a platform with tremendous potential for evangelization.

No religious leader in recent times, has contributed more words to the topic than Pope Saint John Paul II, sometimes called the "sportsman pope." Building upon the



thoughts of his predecessors, and his own love of sport, this great saint compiled throughout his pontificate a vast collection of reflections on sport and its service to—

and potential to harm—the human person.

Specifically, John Paul II identified that sport, ordered rightly, is a "training ground of virtue, a school of inner balance and outer control, an

introduction to more true and lasting conquests" ("Sport as Training Ground for Virtue," Dec. 20, 1979). Yet he also recognized the danger of sport when pursued for the wrong motives, or as "an end in itself."

"If played as they should be, sports become... an ideal context for practicing many virtues." – Pope St. John Paul II

At IHM, we believe that children possess an inherent gift—a passion to become the best version of themselves—which should be celebrated and channeled to help them achieve a prize that endures. A competitive spirit is a gift, and we want to support our athletes as they strive to compete to the best of their abilities. Yet we also assert that while the objective of sport is to win, the purpose of sport is to shape us into the people that God created us to be. Without diminishing our desire to win, we aspire to maintain our focus on the purpose of sport, for the better service of our athletes.

Our goal is to develop the greatness within each child through the habitual practice of virtue using sport as our training ground.

The resulting plan, then, is convinced of its goal and clear in the steps needed to achieve the vision. The plan is also agile, acknowledging that our progress may reveal that the sequencing of our tactical campaign might need adjusting, and that we might need to add or eliminate strategies to achieve the end. While the tactics used to attain the goal are flexible, the goal itself is not; we know where we're going, and we're all on board.



“The quality of a man’s life is in direct proportion to his commitment to excellence, regardless of his chosen field of endeavor.” – Vince Lombardi

Greatness through Virtue

Our athletes at IHM will be emboldened to pursue greatness, and so they will not settle merely for competitive success. **They will realize that to aspire simply to a championship is not to set a goal too high, but far too low, and that authentic greatness pursues much more.** And as our athletes unite to pursue virtue, they will find that authentic friendship arises out of the shared pursuit of something noble and good. Strong community in our programs will develop from shared purpose.

We believe that greatness comes through virtue, and therefore character and virtue development is not simply a nice feature of our approach. It is the foundation.

“Virtue means the best a person can be...” – Saint Thomas Aquinas

The virtues themselves are at the core of the athletic experience, and there are many that could be useful for athletes. In keeping with the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, IHM has chosen to focus on six virtues: the four “Cardinal Virtues” of prudence, justice, courage, and temperance; paired with two virtues worthy of particular note as they pertain to sport: magnanimity and humility. These six virtues will form the backbone of our work with athletes, informing all that we do and aspire to be:

Magnanimity (Great-hearted): Striving for greatness while bringing others along with them.

Humility (Self-forgetful): Acknowledging one’s proper place and limitations. To overcome selfishness and serve others habitually.

Prudence (Wise): Sound reason and judgment to make the right decisions.

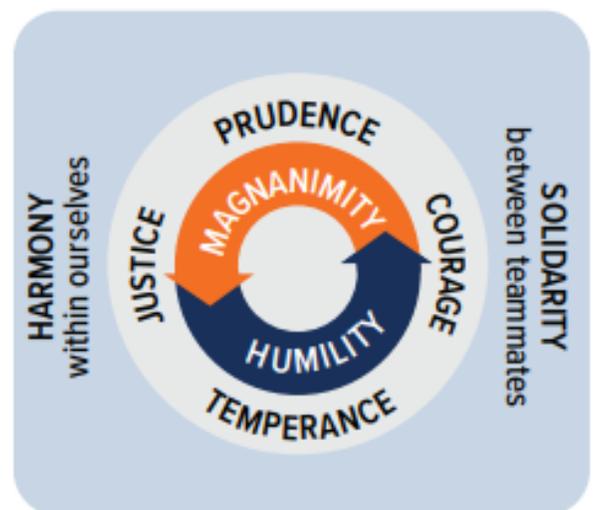
Courage (Gritty): Strength in the face of adversity. To stay the course and resist pressures of all kinds. **Justice (Respectful):** Fairness in giving all their due.

Temperance (Self-mastered): Mastery and moderation of natural desires and passions.

Additionally, we recognize that the signs of these virtues— and thus the signs of greatness that will demonstrate our progress—will be solidarity and harmony. These reveal an integrated individual and communal living.

Solidarity: A community unified by beliefs, actions, and a common goal.

Harmony: Psychological unity and balance.



At IHM, we believe that our athletes are made for the greatness that God has in mind uniquely for them, and that the pathway to achieving that potential comes through the development of virtue. This pathway to greatness includes refining their *desire* for such greatness.

Properly conceived, every aspect of the athletic experience should develop virtue—human excellence— and not merely some lesser end. Sport is meant for more than the pursuit of worldly greatness; rather, it should be a training ground that prepares athletes to approach each pursuit in their lives as an opportunity **to become the best version of themselves.**

Our goal is that virtue is promoted and intentionally developed to create a virtue-based experience that pervades every aspect of the athlete’s formation, one where the virtues are seen as essential and necessary to achieve personal and collective greatness.

We will intentionally work with our coaches, staff, and athletes and help them achieve fluency in the language and concepts of virtue. Our coaches will anchor the best of their coaching philosophy in the tradition and truth of virtue.



“The world promises you comfort, but you were not made for comfort; you were made for greatness.” – Pope Benedict XVI

Our Promise is that in and through the athletic experience, our athletes will be prepared to achieve greatness through virtue in life and for a lifetime. Fortified in mind, body, and soul, we believe they will be prepared for whatever life throws their way, no matter whether prosperity or adversity. Our mission-first, virtue-first approach is designed intentionally to ensure that throughout a lifetime, our athletes will say they were prepared for life because of, and not in spite of, their athletic experience. Therefore, our athletics brand promise is: “Greatness through virtue — for life!”

As a famous sports quote puts it: “Sports don’t develop character, they reveal it.” At IHM— when done rightly—sports both develop and reveal character.