

Point of View

by Ralph Pohlman



No Fun In Games

I haven't had a good rant for a long time, but I feel one coming up. Ah, yes, here it is. Or perhaps it's just that salami and pickle sandwich fighting back.

Anyway, I have become a terrible cynic about big-time sports. I'm not sure when this happened, or maybe it has just grown over time. It mostly came to a head with the baseball strike a few years ago. Up until then I was a fan who believed the Jays were really Toronto's team and the players actually cared about the city. What a sap, eh?

Of course, I should have had a hint after the first World Series win when an American friend said to me, "Shoot! Your Dominicans are better than our Dominicans."

Somehow it seems that business, politics and nationalism have taken over sports. Maybe that was always true, but now they make no attempt to hide it. The NHL playoffs run until the summer, like a separate season, with more teams in the playoffs than Bill Gates has dimes. So why watch the irrelevant regular season at all?

Whenever I read the spin-doctor publicity that sport creates goodwill between nations, I think of it as a cooked up commercial, about as true as "Things go better with Coke" or with Kentucky Fried Chicken or Tide, or other advertising myths.

At the international level, certainly, and even between towns or cities, sport is warfare. Just ask Thomas Junta in

Reading, Mass., who was found guilty in the beating death of his 10-year-old son's hockey coach. This is not only true of the players but of the behaviour and attitude of the spectators, and behind the spectators, of the nations who believe the performances by their athletes, whether skating, running or throwing something, are tests of national virtue. Behind it all is the attitude of "mine is bigger than yours."

Serious sport has nothing to do with fair play. Tonya Harding might confirm that. As President Mobutu Sese Seko said, when he dispatched the Zaire soccer team to the World Cup competition, "Win or die!"

The Olympics have always been an arena for national pride and a setting for addressing old grievances. But the wonderfully entertaining Olympics also add to the enormous fund of ill will in the world.

The Jamie Sale-David Pelletier pairs skating decision is only one example. Sensing exposure, the judges suddenly ran for cover. The Chinese judge developed a bad cold and left town. The French judge took the fall for vote trading even though anyone who watches figure skating competitions suspects this has been normal procedure for years. And the other disputes with the North Koreans and Russians threatening to not take part in the final ceremony, were only the ante to the pot.

Even the competition to stage the Olympics has become overtly corrupt. This is, after all, a highly successful corporation, one which has tried, reasonably

successfully, to protect its well-manicured public image, while at the same time accepting backroom bribes from competing cities. Let us not be naive, the Olympics is politics through sport.

Of course, soccer, the world's most popular sport, is the prime example of nationalism gone nuts, particularly in Europe and South America. A British diplomat once noted, "There are two things every diplomat, no matter his nationality, dreads. One is for his country to dispatch a goodwill naval visit and give 3,000 sailors shore leave. The other is to try to build international relations through football."

The Central American countries of Honduras and El Salvador share a border of about 180 miles and a passion for the sport. In 1969, a soccer game actually precipitated a war between the two countries with machine guns, air bombings, tank deployment and the invasion of Honduras by the El Salvadorean Army. By the time it was over, there were 6,000 dead, more than 12,000 wounded, some 50,000 deprived of their homes and fields and many villages destroyed.

And when WrestleMania, which has long demonstrated that its place on the crude meter is right down there with the flush knob, came to town it was a sellout. But then, those same folk stood in line 2,000 years ago at the Roman Coliseum, and paid their drachmas to scream as the lions ate the Christians.

One wonders what it would be like if they had a life, or learned to read.

There, that feels better.

FAITH & LIFE

A MENNONITE PERSPECTIVE

by
Father
Peter
Paul
Ssemakula



A New Heart-Beat

Father Peter Paul Ssemakula's reflections on his recent visit to Stouffville.

On March 2nd 2004, George Ssegawa and I flew back to Uganda, ending a three-week visit to Canada. It was an interchange between Bukoto Catholic Parish and Community Mennonite Church of Stouffville organized by Richard and Carolyn Reesor.

I found this trip to be a wonderful opportunity to live, discuss, pray, and share love and concerns between Catholics from Uganda and Mennonites in Canada. As part of this exchange, I delivered the sermon at two Mennonite congregations. I also attended a Mennonite retreat weekend. I was invited into many homes, enjoying the variety of foods offered and the fellowship that comes from eating a meal together.

This privilege to share God's love and learn from each other sent me back with a new heart-beat. I am sure it left the same behind, since already Pastor Alton, from Community Mennonite Church is making plans to visit St Jude Bukoto Catholic Parish in Masaka, Uganda, in August.

As believers, we need to reach out and experience the joy of befriending one another. Moreover, as the Bible indicates, we were created by the same God (Acts 17:26). Though our worship might be different and sometimes our emphasis on points differs, we all believe in ONE GOD. Secondly, JESUS is the key concept of our faith and thirdly LOVE, to God and one another, is the way of serving the one true God. It is always important to reflect on and strengthen what we have in common as human beings and as Christian believers and that promotes fellowship among us.

Though different in faith, when we form deep bonds of friendship and then work, reflect and live together, we discover that the usual tasks of life, e.g.

raising children, love in the family, protecting our environment, living faithfully according to our deepest convictions, ensuring peace and justice and answering the needs of those who suffer illness, stress, poverty and disaster, confront us not just as individuals but together as a people of faith. Thus, our common faith causes us to react to situations and work together.

An example of this was the "Have a Heart for Uganda" music fundraising concert that was held in Stouffville on February 14th. At this concert, Bryan Suderman sang "My Voice Alone". This song suggests that when we join our voice with others, we can make a real difference in the world. When we come together as neighbours in this global village, our faith in God makes a greater influence on the world. The world today needs this strong heart-beat - religious harmonious co-existence that makes us all winners in the end.

I pray that each and all of us always remain as winners to the end, not for ourselves but for Christ.

Feedback? We'd love to hear your comments. Please contact us at:

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Community Mennonite Church

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Sunday School: 9:45 - 10:30 am
Sunday Worship: 11:00 am

Music Mania tackles the silver screen

From the Cutting Room Floor is the title of this year's Music Mania, which runs April 22 to 24 at Stouffville District Secondary School.

The 2004 extravaganza, which has been a venerable community tradition since 1960, will include music from the movies, as well as other well-loved

melodies, along with witty skits, fine choreography and beautiful costumes. "We've loosened it up this year, it's been a very tight format before and we wanted to make it more of a variety show," said spokeswoman Marg Cunningham.

Tickets for Music Mania go on sale at the beginning of April.

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