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Chapter 5

Identity in Sport: a psychological and theological analysis

Nick Watson

Sport, as many commentators have noted, is the new religion. It has superseded Christianity in many cultural theorists' eyes as the social practice par excellence that initiates persons into rules and norms of virtuous and vicious behaviours which orientate us more broadly in the world.

Mike McNamee¹

Fourth in the Olympics hurt, but retirement is like a death in the family ... I struggled for three months ... I'd walk around and just start filling up. I'd wake up lost. I didn't know what to do. My emotions were so intense I felt I'd lost a member of the family. I'd lost a major part of my life, something was dead. Everything I'd lived for was over.

British Olympic Decathlete, Dean Macey, on retiring from sport.

(Slot, 2008, p. 98)

Introduction

Sports philosophers, such as Howard Slusher (1967), Scott Kretchmar (1998) and Heather Reid (2002) have argued that we need to think more philosophically about the *meaning* of sport participation and competition. Kretchmar has recently suggested that in studying sport 'to do ethics *in vacuo*', without some sort of metaphysical (i.e., religious) basis is a questionable endeavor. He sees athletes as 'meaning-seeking, story-telling creatures', who can encounter real drama, experience excellence and self-discovery in healthy sporting

contests. In relation, a small number of sport psychologists have also challenged the current dominance within their discipline of positivistic research and cognitive-behavioral consultancy *techniques* advocating the need for more holistic, philosophical (Martens, 1987; Corlett, 1996a, b; Ravizza, 2002), existential (Nesti, 2004; Dale, 1996, 2000) and spiritual and religious approaches (Schinke and Hanrahan, 2009; Salter, 1997; Watson and Nesti, 2005; Berger, Pargman and Weinberg, 2002).ⁱⁱ The dominant schools of mainstream 20th century psychology (the parent discipline of sport psychology) - experimental, behaviorist, cognitivist and clinical - has also adopted mainly secular theories of human identity based on scientific and positivist philosophy. There are, however, some notable psychologists in the past seventy years who accommodated existential and spiritual ideas in their work, and thus provided a valuable resource for understanding the complexities of human identity in life and sport.

Surprisingly, largely absent from most sports psychology research, with some exceptions (Begel, 2000b; Gray and Polman, 2004; Brewer, Van Raalte and Linder, 1993), is the foundational clinical and interdisciplinary work on human development and identity, of Erik H. Erikson (1902-1994). The curious omission of such *foundational* work on identity within the sports psychology literature, is not the case in theology, with major figures such as Wolfhart Pannenberg's drawing heavily on Erikson in his chapter on *The Problem of Identity* (1985). Erikson's (1968) well-used Eight-Stage *Human Life Cycle* (inc. stages of identity crises) model of human development has led some to herald him as a prophet of the 'age of identity' in which we now live (Hoover, 2004: 1). Alongside the anthropological work of Margaret Mead (1937) and the remarkable socio-historical study of Charles Taylor, *Sources of Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (1989), it is Erikson (1959: 114) who showed any student of identity that 'an individual life cycle (psychological) cannot be adequately

understood apart from the social context in which it comes to fruition' and that 'individual and society are intricately woven, dynamically in continual change'.ⁱⁱⁱ

This will be an important part of my study of identity in sport, for as Phil Night, founder and chairperson of *Nike* states, sports arguably 'define the culture of the world' (cited in Smart, 2005: 1). Although, Erikson was always reasonably open to the value of various religious and spiritual paths and non-empirical concepts, such as love and wisdom (Hoare, 2000), it was not until the end of his career that Erikson reflected more on spirituality and transcendence, in what has been called by his wife, the 'ninth-stage' of his Life-Cycle Model (Erikson, 1997a,b). Following Erikson, some other well-known 20th century psychologists were also open to spiritual and religious notions *broadly conceived*. Abraham Maslow (1962), the founder of humanistic psychology advocated the need for spiritual growth (an oxymoronic concept in humanism?), as have many others in this school and in sport psychology (Ravizza, 1984, 2002). The existential psychiatrist, Victor Frankl, author of the best-selling book, *Man's Search for Meaning* (1959) - surely a prophetic title for the times in which we live - even talked of God (*logos*, trans. word, see John 1: 1-2), fully articulated in his *quasi*-religious understanding of identity and means of soul care, logotherapy (Frankl, 1986: xii). In his own words:

'... logotherapy sees in religion an important ingredient in human existence; religion, that is, in the widest possible sense of the word, namely, religion as an expression of "man's search for *ultimate* meaning." Yet logotherapy - by its very name a meaning centered psychotherapy - views even man's orientation toward the *ultimate* meaning as a *human* phenomenon rather than divine.'

The recent shifts toward spiritual and religious concepts, such as love, creativity, faith and wisdom, within the disciplines of sport philosophy and sport psychology, positive psychology (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and in the works of Erikson, Maslow and Frankl, are then encouraging, and make a significant contribution to my thinking in terms of understanding the complexities of athletic identity. This said, the foundational source of identity (ontologically and epistemologically)^{iv} throughout this body of work is, as Frankl (1986: xii) states, ‘... a *human* phenomenon rather than divine’, and thus puts the *self* at the centre of the framework of meaning (humanism and naturalism), rather than God (supernaturalism). I will argue that this is *diametrically opposed* to a Christian theological perspective of identity as described in the Bible,^v in which humans are called to deny *themselves* and live *in Christ* (Matt. 16: 24-27)^{vi}. This is *not* as burdensome a thing as it may sound to some but rather something that, as C.S Lewis^{vii} notes, actually leads humans to freedom of heart, peace and becoming ‘more truly themselves...it is when I turn to Christ, when I give up myself to His personality, that I first begin to have a personality of my own’.

In hopefully adding something new to the valuable past psychological (Brewer, Van Raalte and Petitpas, 2000), psychiatric and clinical (Gardner and Moore, 2006; Begel and Burton, 2000; Beisser, 1967) sociological (Harris and Parker, 2009; Roderick, 2006; Parker, 1995) and pedagogical (Macdonald and Kirk, 1999) work on athletic identity, and related research on self-worth and dispositional neurotic perfectionism in sport (Hall, 2008; Hill et al., 2008) that is based on a secular and humanistic worldview, this approach provides a significantly different understanding of personhood and how we understand ourselves and others in competitive sport.^{viii} Its core premise is that humans’ identity, that is, their feeling, thinking, attitudes and behavior, should be grounded in, and flow from, the heart of a loving Father God. As Paul states in the Bible (Acts 17: 28) when addressing the Athenian philosophers,

‘for in him we live and move and have our being ...’.

This study is also needed due to longitudinal sports ethics research that has suggested that athletes in Christian and secular American schools show very little difference, if any, in moral-reasoning and that Christian athletes had a tendency to compartmentalize their faith and exclude it from competitive sport (Stoll and Beller, 2008; Beller et al., 1996).^{ix} Why is this so? Can Christian athletes simply follow the strict moral code of the Bible and feel, think and act in the heat of competition and in relationships, in a Christ-like manner? I will argue not, due to the foundational biblical principle that the state of the ‘heart’ of the believer, their *disposition* - the depth of relationship and intimacy with God through Jesus Christ - is the source of all right and wrong, feeling, thinking and acting.

Above all else guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life

(Proverbs 4: 23)

The mouth speaks out of the overflow of the heart

(Matthew 12: 34)

My anthropological start point is predicated on the biblical position that *all* humans are made in the image of God - *imago Dei* (Gen. 1: 27) and comprise soul, body and spirit (1Thessalonians. 5: 23).^x This division of self is useful in analyzing identity in sport. However, throughout this chapter, I wish to combat the Platonic-Cartesian mind-body dualism entrenched in the western thought by referring to the soul, body and spirit holistically as the *heart*, a Hebrew and Pauline perspective (Jeeves, 1997; Pannenberg, 1985).^{xi} This view maintains that the human-being is thoroughly integrated, though with different aspects.

Consistent with this idea that the Christian faith can be described as a *personal* and *intimate* relationship with God in the ‘heart’ of the human believer, versus a dry rule-governed legalistic and judgmental religion (arguably an idol and huge defense mechanism in the modern world),^{xii} and that the word heart is spoken of hundreds of times in the Bible, it is necessary to provide some explanation of this term. In a little known and arguably neglected book, *Biblical Psychology* (1962 / 1936: 97-105), Oswald Chambers provides some clarity on the spiritual nature of the human heart, which he calls the ‘radiator of the personal life’ - the source of human identity and moral reasoning:

The use of the Bible term ‘heart’ is best understood by simply saying ‘me’. The heart is not merely the seat of the affections, it is the centre of everything. The heart is the central altar, and the body is the outer court. What we offer on the altar of the heart will tell ultimately through the extremities of the body...the centre from which God’s working and the devil’s working, the centre from which everything works which moulds the human mechanism...Our Lord undertakes to fill the whole region of the heart with light and holiness ... (2 Corinthians. 4: 6) ... Do I realize that I need it done? Or do I think I can realize myself? That is the great phrase today, and it is growing in popularity - ‘I must realize myself’

‘I must realize *myself*’? Indeed, Chamber’s reflections from the early 20th century are, I would argue, prophetic for the age in which we live. The cultural ethos of ‘self-realization’, or what has been called ‘selfism’ by psychologist Paul Vitz (1994), is so encultured in the west that I agree with those who have argued that pride of the heart ‘is now synonymous with virtue’ in the institutions of media, sport and religion (Higgs and Braswell, 2004: 372). To be sure, this view of identity and self-worth that has no objective foundation, as it is relative to each person, is so deeply woven into the fabric of society, that it is, as the 19th century writer

Kierkegaard (1849) states, the worst form of despair, a ‘fictitious health’. Why? Because it is, as Kierkegaard called it, the disposition of the ‘automatic cultural man’ an *unconscious* denial of the reality of life built on *self*, instead of the source of our being, a Holy loving God. This idea is not new and supports the maxim, ‘read an old book for a new idea’!

The Nobel Prize-winning, atheistic existential philosophers and playwrights of the 1950s, Jean-Paul Sartre (1956) and Albert Camus amongst others, brilliantly showed the meaningless and absurdity of life without belief in a supernatural God. Ironically, this was only a re-hash of ideas clearly articulated in the biblical books of *Ecclesiastes* and *Job* thousands of years before and has provided theists with a logically ‘water-tight’ case, when arguing the need for belief in God to provide purpose and meaning in life. Focusing these ideas back on issues of identity in sport and other domains of life, such as work - a major source of meaning, especially for men - John Eldridge (2001: 90, 150), painfully and truthfully deconstructs any models of identity built on self-realization and the West’s idea of worldly success:

‘The world [the western system] offers man a false sense of power and a false sense of security ... the world cheers the vain search on ... Be brutally honest now - where does your own sense of power come from? Is it ... how well [you] play sport? ... Is it how many people attend your Church? Is it *knowledge* - that you have an expertise and that makes others come to you, bow to you? Is it your position, degree, or title? A white coat, a Ph.D., a podium [?] ... what happens inside you when I suggest you give it up? ... what you would think of yourself if tomorrow you lost everything that the world has rewarded you for?’

Elsewhere, I have reflected on Eldridge's words, suggesting that 'for those embedded in the post-modern world of sport, which is constructed from socio-cultural norms and reinforced and manipulated by the mass media, Eldridge's words may be a little too piercing and thus quickly dispatched to the caverns of the mind, and consequently they will continue to 'travel with the carnival'^{xiii} (Watson and White, 2007: 78). The 'carnival' is what Ernest Becker (1973: 82), in his magnificent presentation of Kierkegaard's psychoanalysis (a Freudian term), calls the 'social hero system', wherein modern humans 'successfully ... play ... the standardized hero-game' of their age to protect themselves from the existential *angst* of the realities of the human condition - absurdity and meaninglessness, without belief in a supernatural God.

As articulated in the writings of St. Augustine, Kierkegaard, Dostoyevsky, Oswald Chambers, G.K. Chesterton and C.S. Lewis and of course the fountain of all their musings, the Bible, the insidiousness of pride and narcissism in the west's cultural value system has resulted in widespread cultural and social fragmentation. This is, in part, a consequence of the liberalization of ethics and the 'human potential' movement (e.g., Esalen Institute) in America.^{xiv} The titles of notable books such as *The Culture of Narcissism: Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (Lasch, 1980), *Psychology as Religion: The Cult of Self-Worship* (Vitz, 1994) and Ernest Becker's award winning *The Denial of Death* (1973), also accurately convey our current situation. Nonetheless, liberal-humanist and post-modern voices that dominate academic sports studies (e.g., sociology, philosophy, psychology, pedagogy) and other disciplines, at times seem oblivious to the evidence all around them that the 19th and 20th century utopian 'myths of progress'^{xv} have been unable to prevent, and have often contributed to, what David Blankenhorn, (1995) and many others in theology (Nouwen, 1979;

Stibbe, 1999; Marx, 2003^{xvi}; McClung, 2005; Prince, 2008; Vitz, 1999) and leisure studies (Kay, 2006a,b; Coakley, 2006) have accurately called a *Fatherless Generation*.

Blankenhorn has convincingly demonstrated, using a range of historical and empirical data, that the postmodern liberalism and nihilism that characterizes much of modern culture has resulted in the breakdown of the family, the most vital and *foundational social unit*. In particular, the related problem of fatherlessness and its *unavoidable* affect on the identity of those who have grown up not knowing the love, care and protection of their natural father^{xvii} (and Heavenly Father), pervades all areas of culture, including sport. A principal aim of this chapter is to suggest that the foundational answer to this problem lies in individuals, communities and nations coming into a knowledge and personal revelation of the love of a Father God. To achieve any clear understanding of individual human identity from this perspective, I must also examine the dominant characteristics (identity) of the society and culture in which individual identity is formed. What Margaret Mead (1937), the well-known anthropologist, called the process of ‘enculturation.’

After providing a rationale for the need of this study, my first task is to analyze the conceptual nature of sports competition and its role in understanding ‘athletic identity’, which has been defined as ‘the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role’ (Brewer, Van Raalte and Linder, 1993: 237). This will allow for a theological and psychological analysis of identity in sport, focusing on pride, humility and idolatry. Pride and humility are the two states of heart that I see as fundamental in understanding both positive and negative aspects of identity in sport. I will then provide extended *Concluding Remarks* due to the embryonic nature of the study of identity in sport from a Christian perspective and

some suggestions for future empirical research and scholarship and a range of resources to assist in this process.

Identity and Competition in Sport

In his book *Winning: The Psychology of Competition* (1980: 4), Stuart Walker makes a number of points about athletic competition, which are important when examining issues of identity in sport:

‘Most competitors think of themselves as being primarily motivated to develop, demonstrate, and enjoy competence. Many, however, are also concerned with the demonstration of power, courage, and aggressiveness. They use competition to overcome feelings of dependence, helplessness, and loss of individuality. Others are more concerned with being approved, appreciated, and admired. They use competition to overcome feelings of being separated, abandoned, and unloved. Competition permits the demonstration of individual significance, which gratifies desire for both assertiveness and approval. The key word is “demonstration.” Competitors perform in public; they assert themselves in the presence of others - of their competitors at the very least.’

Walker’s psychological thesis holds *some* weight, however as Newman (1989) notes, Walker overstates his point as to how competitions are *primarily* activated, i.e. winning is the *only* goal of the athlete. This thesis is far too simplistic and I would agree with Simon (1991: 33), who notes that competition in sport is ethically defensible and that the ‘meeting of the demands athletes place upon their talents often involves beauty, courage, dedication, and

passion'. Nonetheless, the intense emotion and passion often present in the delicately balanced dialectic of competitive sport, Hyland (1988: 177) suggests, also carries the risk that 'such intensity will devolve into alienation and violence'. This is closely tied to athletes' (and coaches', parents' etc.) *need* for recognition, love and demonstrating power and significance, which is conveyed by Walker and is arguably *one* mainstay of modern competitive sport. A psychoanalytical perspective of these needs in competitive sport, Kohn (1992: 106) suggests, would basically run something like: winning = coach's approval = parental acceptance [in child/youth sport] = acceptance of self (self worth).^{xviii} In extending Kohn's social-psychological analysis to include the spiritual, this unhealthy 'disordering of our affections', as church father St. Augustine (354-430c.) put it, may lead to perversion and corruption of the activity in which 'the athlete may delude himself into thinking that his own quest for wealth and fame, or even a championship, will make him happy' (Hamilton, 2003: 7). In other words, for athletes and coaches of this mindset it would seem that 'sport *is* life' (Reid, 2002: 106) and to lose, or be unable to play for whatever the reason, can have catastrophic consequences for the emotional and psychological balance of an individual; that is, their identity.

England Rugby Union World Cup star, Johnny Wilkinson, has recently confessed the underlying reason for the 'near destruction of his career - an obsessive quest for perfection' (Jackson, 2006: 50). This is something that is acutely conveyed in the title of his recent biography, *Tackling Life: Striving for Perfection* (2008). In light of the 'win-at-all-costs' ethic, reflect on Wilkinson's very honest and illustrative comments about his injuries, the meaning of rugby for him and how this has impacted upon his psychological well-being and understanding of *life itself*:

‘The truth is that I was wracked with anxiety, almost constantly. I wanted it [to achieve] so badly that I was beating myself up. It was the same whether I played for Newcastle, England or the Lions. Before the game it was nerves. After the game it was a harsh post-mortem - why did I miss that tackle? Why did I miss that conversion? ... All the intensity and attrition brought with it intense fatigue. That resulted in injuries which, in turn, have resulted in a lot of pain and anguish ... You hear yourself saying only good things will come of this, that there’s a reason for it and you’ve saved yourself for two years of being battered but none of it is really true ... I would have given anything to have played consistently ... There have been times when it’s been hugely painful. I’ve been incredibly depressed, demoralised, even bitter ... I feel as if I’ve let myself down then, because it’s all about setting benchmarks as a person and there have been times when I’ve failed to reach these marks. It has made me lose my way in so far as all my life I’ve done nothing but think and play rugby. When it’s taken away from you for as long as it has been, it makes you unsure over what you’re supposed to do with your life (Jackson, 2006: 80).’

Interestingly, Wilkinson’s emotional rollercoaster following a catalogue of injuries since his moment of glory with that famous drop-kick in the dying seconds of the 2003 Rugby World Cup Final (Sydney), has led *Times* journalist, Souster (2009: 84), to suggest that he has now undergone an almost ‘... spiritual change’. Arguably, Wilkinson has experienced what the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber called a ‘shudder of identity’ (Agassi, 1999), that is, one of the primary sources of meaning in *life* has been removed and he is searching his soul for purpose and meaning. Ruben (cited in Kohn, 1992: 111) captures something of this in stating that for ‘many strong competitors, upon reaching the summit of their aspirations ... the discovery, ultimately, that “making it” is often a hollow gain, is one of the most traumatic

events that the successful can experience'. Along with many others, Wilkinson has encountered the existential angst, fear and sense of worthlessness that often accompanies the loss of a significant 'life project' (Sartre, 1956) like sport, what cultural anthropologist, Ernest Becker, (1973: 3) aptly describes as the 'dread of insignificance'. This anxiety and sense of worthlessness is likely to be more intense for professional full-time athletes (Null, 2008) such as Wilkinson, in comparison to amateurs due to the greater time, significance, meaning and ultimately sense of identity invested in sport, a 'life project'.

Sad stories of retired athletes, for example British soccer players from the 1980s and early 1990s in particular, sliding into alcoholism and suffering from serious relationship problems (e.g., divorce) illustrates the potentially catastrophic identity issues that can ensue when sport, the 'life project', is lost (e.g., Roderick, 2006; Jupitus, 2008).^{xix} The poignant and yet often failed and embarrassing 'comebacks' of professional athletes at the end of their careers, is another example of how sport can become an 'unhealthy obsession'. The 'old pro' is unable to let go of their sporting life in an anxious quest to hold onto a major source of their identity in *life*.

These fears of loss and failure are very often *hidden* behind psychological defences, what Christian psychologists have aptly called, 'fig-leaves',^{xx} such as a mask of competence, outward success, and sense of 'having it all together', the very ethos of the western world. This is most often an *unconscious* response and stems from *foundational* low self-worth. Evidence of this existential angst in elite and youth sport performers has been shown in research on dispositional neurotic perfectionism (Hall, 2008) and 'fear of failure' (Sager, Lavalley and Spray, 2009), psychiatric writings on the mental health of athletes (Burton, 2000; Begel, 1992) and theological (Hamilton, 2002) and philosophical (McNamee, 2008)^{xxi}

reflection on shame in sport, with athletes suffering from feelings of narcissism, guilt, shame, negative mood and resultant decrements in performance.

For an athlete in competitive sports, the feeling associated with moving teams, athletic retirement (Lavallee and Wylleman, 2000; Kerr and Dacyshyn 2001), career-ending injuries (Udry *et al.*, 1997) and defeat can be great and is often the precursor to feelings of loss and neurotic anxiety,^{xxii} and in some cases what consultant sport psychiatrist Robert Burton (2000) classifies as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Indeed, for some athletes this loss of identity and self-worth associated with these *perceived* traumatic occurrences in sport, has resulted in clinical depression and occasionally suicide attempts (Oglivie, 1987; Smith and Milliner, 1994), as was sometimes the case in ancient Greek athletics (Higgs and Braswell, 2004).

Although this is not a simple correlation, since many other factors determine an athlete's sense of identity, such as sex, personality, race and ethnicity, education, culture, family background and past experience (Brewer, Van Raalte and Petitpas, 2000), the physical body, the individual's name^{xxiii} and group membership (Pannenberg, 1985: 225), nevertheless playing and winning equals 'being', and losing equates to 'non-being'. 'Non-being threatens man's self-affirmation' suggests theologian Paul Tillich (1952: 41). In the athletic arena this may lead to a sense of unworthiness and insecurity in the athlete when they lose, or fail to come up to the often unrealistic and unhealthy expectations of pushy coaches, parents and even nations.^{xxiv}

Though by definition, these losses are simply a temporal evaluation, ask any athlete or coach and, if honest, they will admit that at times they allow their performance to define their being

and so for them a *loss* is tantamount to defeat or failure (symbolic death) as a person (Reid, 2002). This is what sport psychologists call the ‘hero-to-zero’ syndrome. In discussing the loss and sorrow of losing in competitive sport, Higgs and Braswell (2004: 75) use ‘the term “pseudo-sorrow” to express the emotional state of losers’ and state that ‘real sorrow lives in hospitals and in funeral homes and indeed ordinary homes without number’. While of course there is very real suffering in sport that can be a mix of physical, mental and spiritual (Loland, Skirstad and Waddington, 2005; Nesti, 2007b; Howe, 2004), this again conveys how sport has become for many in the west an idol^{xxv} that is intimately tied to the identity and self-worth of athletes and fans. I am not suggesting that athletes should not passionately^{xxvi} care about sport and become emotionally involved. This is in part what makes sport participation and competition so exciting, fulfilling and healthy.

In support of Hochstetler, Hopsicker and Kretchmar (2008) and Twietmeyer’s (2008) holistic conception of sport, neither do I advocate a dualistic worldview in which ‘real sorrow’ only exists in ‘real life’ outside of sport. I hold firmly to a biblical, Pauline and ultimately Jewish anthropology - mind, body and spirit are viewed as *one (nephesh)* - supporting the notion that our experience of suffering, loss, joy and sorrow, is valid in all of life’s diverse situations and messiness (Johnson, 1998). However, if ‘post-match blues’ slide into prolonged self-pity, moods and depression that affects the athlete and is *projected* on to others, then arguably, sport has become an idol. The destructive consequences of the ‘win-at-all-costs’ ethic of modern sport (especially on individual identity) has been examined in more detail elsewhere (Watson and White, 2007), and is also prevalent in organized child and youth sport that reflects trends in professional adult sport.

A wealth of studies and writings exist that have documented the negative and worrying trends in elite child and youth sport development strategies and grass-roots sport policy, which are

linked to the cultural ethos of winning-at-all-costs.^{xxvii} I would argue the most comprehensive analysis of this endemic problem is Paulo David's important book, *Human Rights in Youth Sport: A Critical Review of Children's rights in Competitive Sports* (2005) that covers areas such as overtraining, eating disorders, physical and mental burnout, elite youth sport programs and the negative effect of parental pressure and expectations.^{xxviii}

Instead of viewing competition as a healthy test or mutual striving toward excellence, the etymological root of the term (Hyland, 1988), or as a *playful* form of developmental recreation, it has become to some degree a questioning of the athlete's or child's/youth's very existence and their source of self-worth. This has been clearly articulated by religious studies scholar, Michael Grimshaw (2000: 87), in his analysis of the idolatrous nature of modern sport, in which he argues a 'pagan mythology of fallible gods' has evolved. To be sure, for many participants and spectators modern sport is a religion in the ritualistic and functional sense (*see* Prebish, 1993),^{xxix} with many similarities evident between the practice and rituals of modern sport and religion

For the elite athlete, winning in sport is then frequently inflated to a form of immortality (Schmitt and Leonard, 1986) and thus idolatry, resulting in the individual seeking to justify the meaning of their existence through their sport participation. The complex and differing motivations *of heart* to succeed, in the 1924 Olympic Games, shown by Harold Abrahams and Eric Liddle, is beautifully portrayed in the award winning film, *Chariots of Fire*, and is a good example of this.^{xxx} As Cashmore (2008: 162) has noted in his socio-historical analysis of the film, Abrahams '... individualistic, self-interested approach to competition ... is ... entirely congruent with the 'win-at-all-costs' mentality that was to become prevalent in [modern] sport'. From a Christian perspective, glorification of the *self* in any human

endeavor, as was arguably *one* motivation of Harold Abrahams in this film, is rooted in the sin of pride, the ‘complete anti-God state of heart’, according to C.S. Lewis (1997/1952: 100).

The Role of Pride and Humility in Sporting Identity

Pride is *essentially* competitive above all other vices

C.S. Lewis

Learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart

Jesus of Nazareth

Sporting tales, as those described above, illustrate how the ego of the athlete can predominate in a quest to win and ultimately to appear and feel superior or even god-like,^{xxx1} which when you consider Harold Abrahams words and the boasts of modern athletes together with the explicit *worship* of modern sports stars in the media and their institutionalization in Halls of Fame, I would argue is not an exaggeration for *some*. Drawing on excerpts from Schneider’s theology of personhood and his criticisms of Sartre’s atheism, Pannenberg (1985: 234) articulates this clearly:

‘To the extent that human beings try to gain their wholeness and strive to be “in and for themselves,” they are always a “desire to be God” ... Thus the striving for the self-realization that is directed toward the wholeness of one’s being is in fact to be understood as an expression of sin, of the will “to be like God”’.

From a psychological standpoint, this can be understood as the athlete, coach, sporting parent (vicariously) needing to attain ‘self-actualization’ (Maslow, 1962) through worldly success,

adulation and affirmation in competition and their career. Van Kaam (1975: 177, 195) in his incisive assessment of modern psychology and modern culture, points to this, in suggesting that ‘an overemphasis on introspective attitudes has seriously hindered the spiritual growth of western man ... we are ego-centered, when we should be God-centered’. In support of Van Kaam and the reflections of the theologian Pannenberg, psychologist, Paul Vitz (1994: 91) concludes in his trenchant critique of humanistic and atheistic-existential psychology - the work of Jung, Rogers, Fromm and Maslow - that the ‘relentless and single-minded search for and glorification of the self...is at direct cross-purposes with the Christian injunction to lose the self’.^{xxxiii} Lose the *self* in an age of success?

By modern *worldly standards* of success, *Jesus Christ was the greatest failure in human history*, something that was clearly prophesied in the writings of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah^{xxxiii}, seven hundred years before his birth. To be sure, the Christian story does not portray Jesus as a ‘self-actualizer’! No, the Christian narrative records that he ‘... made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death on a cross!’ (Philippians 2: 7-8). The gospels (trans. *Greek*, good news) in the New Testament, which are both prophetic and historical documents,^{xxxiv} state that from the time Jesus ‘set his face to go to Jerusalem’ after his wrestling with his calling and destiny in the garden of Gethsemane, the words of Isaiah the prophet began to be fulfilled:^{xxxv}

‘He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering....he was despised and we esteemed him not...surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows....he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by

his wounds we are healed...he was oppressed and afflicted yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter...Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer...the Lord makes his life a guilt offering...after the suffering of his soul he will see the light of life....'

(Isaiah 53)

Why did Jesus have to tread the path that theologian Timothy Savage (1996: 188) notes, is a 'strange' and 'alien' glory anticipated by ... Isaiah, a light revealed in the darkness of death, a splendour manifested in the most appalling object of antiquity - a cross'? Indeed, the blood-soaked cross paradoxically speaks of reconciliation, light and love, as personified in Jesus himself being described as the 'light of the world' in the prologue to John's gospel. The purpose of Jesus Christ's sacrifice, as described in Christian thought, was to reconcile his Father's creatures (humans) back into an intimate relationship with himself: *at-one-ment*. Theologians call this the *atonement* and contend that all three dimensions of the trinity, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, are involved in the process (McGrath, 2001)^{xxxvi} and that it is the path to eternal life, deep joy and a 'peace ... which transcends all understanding' (Philippians 4: 7a; Isaiah. 26: 3) regardless of earth's circumstances. This is clearly described in an oft-cited bible verse ...

'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life' (John 3: 16)

Commenting on the meaning of the atonement for individual identity, the priest-psychologist, Adrian Van Kaam (1975: 143) notes that 'an infinite love tenderly called me forth out of nowhere and nothingness; an unspeakable Love emptied itself to redeem the identity that I

lost sight of in sinfulness; an enlightening Love keeps calling me back to what I am'. Herein lies the paradox^{xxxvii} of the Christian faith, articulated by C.S Lewis in that 'the more we let God take us over, the more truly ourselves we become - because he made ... it is when I turn to Christ, when I give up myself to His personality, that I first begin to have a personality of my own',^{xxxviii} in all domains of life, including sport.

Following this central biblical theme of surrender to Christ - 'If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation' (2 Corinthians 5: 17) - it is then the *relationship in the heart* of the Christian believer with a Father God, through the third person of the trinity, the Holy Spirit,^{xxxix} that Christians believe 'guards' their 'hearts and minds in Christ Jesus' (Philippians 4: 7b).

Coherent with the Christian anthropology laid out in my introduction the *heart* is then understood as the seat of all wrong or right feeling, thinking and behaving, and thus is the foundational source of human identity in all of life's activities, including sport. Considering that the Psalmist (51: 17) states that it is 'a broken and contrite heart ...' that allows for an intimate relationship with God, how does this fit with a modern understanding of Christianity in the west, and conceptions of identity in sport?

The Reverend Mark Townsend's words in his recent thought-provoking book, *The Gospel of Falling Down: The Beauty of Failure in an Age of Success* (2007: 44-45)^{xl}, conveys a realistic picture of the god-man who walked the earth two thousand years ago and the religion he expressed:

'Failure, rather than success, is at the heart of the life of Jesus and his message. He came to liberate us from the "gospel of success". It is not in "climbing the ladder of perfection" [i.e., maladaptive perfectionism] that we meet God, but in falling from it.

And it is then that we discover the most beautiful spiritual gold ... The Gospel is not about *success* ... To make the Gospel into a means of being successful is to seriously miss the point. We live in a success-dominated world, and much of the (especially Western) Church has become a success-dominated religion. What is the central symbolic image for the Christian faith? It's a cross of wood, with a figure of a man nailed to it – a naked, bleeding man. A man so wounded, so humiliated, so crushed that one can barely imagine...'

Therefore, as Clements (1994) and Savage (1996) have articulated, it is *through* a journey of weakness (*not* in character), brokenness, vulnerability and sacrificial love that Jesus went to the cross, and it is believed by Christians, resurrected by his Father - the event on which the Christian story stands or falls. Interestingly then, consultant sport psychiatrist, Dr Daniel Begel (2000a: xiv-xvi), who has worked with amateur and professional American sports teams, elucidates how thoughts of 'weakness and vulnerability' in modern sport are often *diametrically opposed* to the identity of the modern athlete:

'If there is any character trait that is anathema to an athlete it is that of weakness. Being unable to handle one's feelings, and confessing that inability to another human being in intimate conversation, is not usually concordant with an athlete's sense of mastery...the role of professional athlete may increase the risk of suffering a specific narcissistic vulnerability, and retirement from sports at any level carries with it an increased risk of clinical depression, especially if the retirement is forced by injury, or waning abilities ...'

Not to be misinterpreted at this juncture in my argument, achievement and excellence, strength of character and body and success in sport, is *not* at all antithetical to the Christian way of life. But it can be dangerous, because of the proud and self-reliant ethos of western culture that dominates big-business professional sport, which is often but certainly not always, characterised by individualism, vain-glory and ultimately pride of the heart (Watson and White, 2007; Lasch, 1980). Pride of the heart is what C.S. Lewis (1997/1952) and professor of pastoral psychology, Donald Capps (1987: 46-52), calls 'the great sin' and is the root of most other sins which are arguably prevalent in modern sport, such as greed, vanity and self-glorification.

Both Lewis and Capps are, however, balanced in their reflections on pride, emphasizing that there are positive and negative forms of pride. For example in sport, having a sense of one's own self-worth and dignity in performance as an athlete or coach, taking pleasure in being praised by parents, coaches, fans and team-mates and satisfaction in one's sporting achievements, are all examples of pride in a positive sense. This said, it has been argued, and I agree, that pride 'is now synonymous with virtue' in the institutions of sport, religion and the media (Higgs and Braswell, 2004: 372). According to Christian scripture, 'life projects' like sport, can then easily become idols that blind people to deeper spiritual truths about 'who they are' - their identity - and what is *ultimately* important in life.

C.S Lewis unwittingly provided a sound theoretical basis for analysing identity in sport from a Christian theological perspective (Watson and White, 2007). If pride, as Lewis (1997/1952: 101) suggests, 'is *essentially* competitive above all other vices' how does this specifically relate to understanding identity in sport? The findings of Stevenson's (1997) qualitative investigation of the culture of elite sport and the moral dilemmas this raises for Christian

athletes, sheds some light on this. One participant comments, 'It's weird. I just couldn't let go of not winning. If we lost, I just couldn't let it go for a week - it would, like, boil inside me'. Another participant states, 'I think there's times when ... as an athlete, when we're excelling to become our best ... [that] we lose sight of everything [else] around us'.

Stevenson concludes that 'these athletes struggled with the overwhelming priority placed on winning in the contemporary sport culture' that 'led to a number of consequences with which they were uncomfortable' (244-245). Clearly, organized child and youth sports are also a major vehicle for this cultural ethos and its subsequent problems. 'In childhood, the discovery of athletic talent may determine a person's role within the family and identity within society in significant, if not always salutary, ways', suggests sport psychiatrist, Begel (2000a). It seems that the centrifugal forces that act upon and within the microcosm of sport are difficult to step outside of.

Thomas á Kempis (1380-1471c.), in his well-known devotional work, *The Imitation of Christ* (1952: 50), advises that 'no man can live in the public eye without risk to his soul'. Christian teaching suggests that the 'weapons' and source of 'power' with which humans (modern athletes) can combat their prideful human nature that will cause them to desire recognition, seek *vain*-praise and glory and act in a manner that will possibly lead to the alienation of others (opponents and family etc.), are love and humility from surrendering to God. As Capps (1987: 50) has observed 'pride is also a form of *isolation* ... and personal bondage ... because it is a form of self-love in which we deny our need for community with others'. Humility is the virtue directly opposite the sin of pride that leads to alienation and isolation, which Lewis (1997/1952: 100) contends is the 'complete anti-god state of mind', and which had its genesis in the fall from grace of some of God's angelic realm and humanity. From this

point in world history, in every dimension of life including sport, Murray (1982: 118) suggests that ‘pride and humility are the two master powers - the two kingdoms at war’ in our hearts, which will determine our feelings, thoughts and actions in the heat of sporting competition.^{xli}

In this fallen, messy and broken world, what theologians call the state of the ‘already, not yet’^{xlii}, this will be a process of struggling and wrestling with issues of the heart, whether a believer or not, due to *common grace*^{xliii} afforded to all humans, and the paradoxical and mysterious nature of human existence, as acknowledged by Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians (5: 2-4 and 17). Empirical research on moral reasoning in Christian and non-Christian athlete college populations (Stoll and Beller, 2008), seems to provide evidence of this. It is argued that *self* control is not the master Christian virtue as some have suggested (Baumeister and Exline, 2000). But rather that all ‘Christians must yield actively to God. Yielding is the master virtue, which produces control by the “new self”. Attempting to achieve moral control is ... a battle ... a Christian view of self-control finds the self to be *inadequate* to win the struggle for virtue (Worthington and Berry, 2005: 157), as the apostle Paul found out in his life of dependence and surrendering his heart to God (Romans (7: 7-25).

Surrendering the heart to God, according to Andrew Murray (1982) is when ‘true humility comes ... in the light of God, we ... have consented to part with and cast away self - to let God be all. The soul that has done this and can say ‘I have lost myself in finding You,’ no longer compares [the root of pride and alienation] itself with others’ (Murray, 1982: 59-60). Belief in this world-view then transforms Sartre’s (1956) ‘life projects’, such as sport, family, work and all forms of recreation into *gifts* from God (James. 1: 17) to provide his creatures with meaning, enjoyment and health, well-being and even enhanced sport performance (this

is *not* the aim of Christianity!).^{xliv} But as gifts they do not provide ‘ultimate meaning’ and the primary source of our identity, as the painful biblical story of Job (1: 6-22) and modern stories of alienation, abuse and depression in sport show.

Concluding Reflections

‘... Christian psychology is not the study of human nature Christianised, but the endeavour to understand the wonder and the mystery of “Christ in you, the hope of glory”’

Oswald Chambers (1922)

God made me for a purpose but he also made me fast and when I run I feel his pleasure.

Eric Liddell, *Chariots of Fire*

The aim of this chapter was to provide a psychological and theological analysis of identity in sport while also acknowledging the importance of social, cultural and historical forces in identity formation. Following others, I have argued that as a ‘moulder and reflection of 20th century attitudes towards human nature’ (Johnson, 1997: 12), modern psychology (and sport psychology) that is largely characterized by individualism, humanism, positivism and a relativist epistemology, is diametrically opposed to Christian psychology (especially anthropology and ontology). Nonetheless, I also heartily support Dallas Willard (2000: 256), who wisely notes that ‘psychological and theological understanding of the spiritual life must go hand in hand. Neither of them is complete without the other’. Therefore, in any comprehensive study of identity in sport, both empirical and theoretical research in sport psychology, on areas such as ‘athletic identity’ (e.g., Athletic Identity Measurement Scale)

motivational theory, human development models (e.g., Erikson), forms of psychological abnormality and mechanisms of the brain must be synthesized with sound theology and biblical anthropology.

In particular, I would emphasize the accuracy of the anthropological starting point when studying identity in sport from a Christian perspective, in that ‘the image of God in the New Testament reflects a theological and philosophical struggle with some of the most important questions of human existence. Who are we as humans, and to whom do we ultimately belong?’ (Krause, 2005: 360). In trying to answer these questions in sport, scholars should carefully examine both Hebrew and Christian anthropology (e.g., McFadyen, 1990; Chambers, 1957; Pannenberg, 1985; Macquarrie, 1982; John Paul II, 1997)^{xlv} when deciding how they should respond to the tenets of modern psychology, so that, as Johnson (1997) in pointing to the bible stresses, they are not taken ‘... captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than Christ.’ (Colossians 2: 8) - humanism, secularism, nihilism and selfishness. For those wishing to examine issues of identity in sport from a Christian standpoint there are a number of useful non-sport sources in the psycho-theological literature and writings on the ‘Fatherhood of God’, which I have argued is central to understanding Christian identity in sport.^{xlvi}

Although previous writings specifically on athletic identity in the sports literature are sparse, the excellent work of scholar Ashley Null (2008, 2004), sport psychologists Mark Nesti (2007a,b,c) and Derek de la Pena (2004), reflections from the Vatican’s office for ‘Church and Sport’ on chaplaincy in sport (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2008), and analyses of idolatry in sport (White, 2008; Moltman, 1989; Watson and White, 2007; Gibson, 2008) should all be

of use in grasping the psychological and theological complexities of identity in the sports realm. Returning to the work of Erikson (1959: 114), let us also remember when analyzing athletic identity, the ‘social context in which it (identity) comes to fruition’ is vitally important. While not allowing ‘sociology to displace theology’ (e.g., Feuerbach, Marx, Durkheim *et al.*.) and understanding that theologizing ‘does not take place in a vacuum’, Campbell (2008: 11, 2) warns that ‘it is important to review our understanding of *historic Christian identity* in its social, cultural and theological dimension, and reflect upon this in the light of new evidence’. Therefore, it is also crucial to draw on key mainstream sociological works such as that of Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1990/1959) and Anthony Giddens’s (1991), specific sociological analyses of the sport-religion interface (e.g., Coakley, 2007; Jarvie, 2006; Magdalinski. and Chandler, 2002), recent important work on social identity formation in sport contexts (Harris and Parker, 2009) and the ever-increasing corpus of writings on the cultural and sociological (e.g., Elias and Dunning, 1986; Coakley and Dunning, 2002) and socio-historical (e.g., Guttman, 1978) dimensions of sport.

Nonetheless, since the evolution of modern atheistic sociology in the nineteenth century, the foundation of the discipline of sports sociology in the 1960’s and the advent of so-called postmodernism, Cobb (2005: 185) argues that ‘we find ourselves casting about for new moorings upon which to secure our identities’. In short, the majority of modern sociology (and psychology) I would argue stands on ‘epistemological and ontological sand’, in which identity construction is like ‘shopping for a self’ (Lyon, 2000). A ‘false myth’ according to C.S. Lewis that was brilliantly deconstructed by the philosopher (epistemologist), Michael Polanyi, in what many view as a ‘paradigmatic’ but often neglected book, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (1958). A depressing reality, when considering the logically watertight philosophy of the avowed atheist Bertrand Russell, in

which he concludes that ‘unless you assume a God, the question of life’s purpose is meaningless.’^{xlvii} The Christian view of life’s meaning, the created world and society and culture, is however, far removed from this honest but bleak *human-centred* outlook and shows how societal structures and culture can be a means of God’s grace and love to His creatures.

Although there is an ever-increasing literature on the *Theology of Culture* (e.g. Cobb, 2005; Percy, 2005; Lynch, 2005) that is helpful for Christian scholars in sport seeking to grasp social and cultural dynamics in sport studies, it is the seminal book of H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (1951), which is arguably a key start point for those wishing to explore how Christians relate to culture and how identity can be positively or negatively formed within it. Michael Wittmer (2008) has adapted Niebuhr’s 5-point typology to examine modern sport and thus has provided an excellent foundation for others. Scholars should also not overlook Karl Barth’s theology as a source of much wisdom (Metzger, 2003), in keeping theological (and psychological) study of identity Christocentric - Barth’s great contribution to the 20th century theological enterprise. These psychological, theological and sociological analyses suggested above, should be helpful for those wishing to critically explore a multitude of unanswered questions concerning personal and social identity in sport from a Christian standpoint.

Following the mapping of the human genome at the turn of the 20th century and the valuable but primarily humanistic analyses of genetic enhancement in sport (e.g., Miah, 2004), theological analyses are crucial in assessing the wider implications of being able to tamper with the make-up (anthropology and legal issues)^{xlviii} of human-beings (e.g., Trothen, 2008). Exploration of how states of heart, such as pride and humility, impact upon moral reasoning

(Worthington and Berry, 2005) and relationships (e.g., Marshall, 1992; Mason, 1999; Quoist, 1965) in sport, is another important area to explore, for as C.S. Lewis (1997/1952: 102) has suggested, ‘pride has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began ... pride means enmity - it *is* enmity’. A prideful heart that seeks personal glory, gain and self-worth primarily in sporting success, will often alienate and disregard others, leading to the damage and breakdown of relationships (e.g., Hellstedt, 2000). The role of shame and guilt in this process, which often leads to *striving* for personal glory and self-worth in sport and to the alienation of others, is a related area for further enquiry (see Hamilton, 2002; Twitchell, 1997; Tournier, 1962).

Research on how identity may impact upon sports leadership models from a Christian worldview is also needed. The concept of *Servant Leadership* described in Rieke, Hammermeister and Chase’s (2008) empirical study of basketball coaches, a qualitative investigation by MacDonald and Kirk (1999) on Christian identity in health and physical education teachers (*see also* Schroeder and Schroeder’s, 2006) and the legendary reflections of ‘Coach Wooden’ (e.g., Wooden, 2005),^{xlix} all provide a foundation for this, and pave the way for related topics such as the influence of prayer¹ and gender on identity formation and maintenance, and leadership.

The recent scholarship of Deardorff and Deardorff (2008) on Christian ‘masculine and feminine templates’ and Farooq and Parker’s (2009) research on Islamic masculinity, within the confines of sporting subculture, also opens up an important line of enquiry on athletic identity. Investigating Judea-Christian counseling models for sport psychologists, coaches and chaplains, perhaps based on Martin Buber’s concept of *I and Thou* (see Agassi, 1999; Buber, 1958/1923; Nesti, 2004; Watson and Nesti, 2005; Watson, 2006; Progen and DeSensi,

1984) is another topic to explore, as arguably that the foundational identity of the counselor or practitioner can have a significant impact upon the effectiveness of the therapeutic / practitioner relationship. According to the teaching of the bible, the Christian believer is expected to live *supernaturally*, in faith and dependence on God, in all domains of life, including sport, thus, the use of spiritual gifts^{li} underpinned by the *foundational* fruits of the spirit^{lii} - love and humility - should also be an area for further enquiry. The testimony of Scottish professional footballer, Marvin Andrews, allegedly having his ruptured anterior-cruciate ligament miraculously healed through faith in God and prayer, as reported in the *Times* (Slot, 2005) and Ian Lawrence's (2009)^{liii} fascinating qualitative study in which he interviewed Andrews, is one example of this.

To develop past thought-provoking work on identity in disability sport (e.g., Smith and Sparkes, 2008; Sparkes and Smith, 2002) from a theological stance, researchers could begin to examine existential meaning and spirituality in athletes with physical and intellectual disabilities. What does physical movement through sporting activities mean, if anything, for those with profound intellectual disabilities? How does participation in sport impact on the identity of those with physical disabilities and how, if at all, could this have spiritual meaning? How do individuals in a society bound to a dominant worldview of competition, physical competence (e.g., able-bodied Olympics), rationality and intellectualism, respond to the broken minds of those with profound intellectual disabilities, that can't be fully 'understood', 'fixed' or 'cured'?

Commenting on the theme of my last question, Graeme Watts (2008: 8-9) draws on the provocative suggestion of Wolf Wolfensberger (2001) that people with an intellectual disability may have actually been chosen by God to be the prophets of our age - an age in

which many seek to win-at-all-costs, to appear competent to ‘have it all together’. Watts observes that Wolfensberger may be making this case with more than a touch of hyperbole but argues that in promoting values opposite to those so tightly held as ‘normal’, it is perhaps the obviously limited capacity of those with an intellectual disability which acts as a reminder that to be human also includes those who are dependant and fall short of generally held ideals. In this context I would also agree with Stanley Hauerwas’ (1986: 176) assertion that those with profound disabilities often ‘... remind us of the limits of our power, and we do not like those who remind us’, something that has perhaps significantly affected the Church’s limited theological reflection on disability. Further study in this area may help ‘self-reliant’ westerners to consider life’s purpose, which of course includes the meaning and purpose in sports and accurate conceptions of humility.

Some sections of the Church have historically had a *false* view of humility, in which God-given gifts, talents and desires of the heart have been de-emphasized and shunned ‘...under the guise of *devotion to Christ*’ (Johnson, 2006: 38). Following Bill Johnson, I would argue this is not an accurate portrayal of Christian life, in which creativity, joy and excellence should, where possible, be sought in all domains of life, including sport. I also wholeheartedly support some of the conclusions of Barry Smart (2005: 198-199), in his comprehensive analysis of *The Sport Star ... Sporting Celebrity*: ‘the achievements of high profile professional sporting figures posses a quality that is increasingly rare in a world made cynical (corruption in sport) ... the excitement and emotion aroused by the uncertainty of sporting encounters ... the pleasure derived, and frequently collectively shared ... as a spectator or viewer’. In this vein, through analysing Karl Barth’s work on the famous composer, Wolfgang Amadaeus Mozart and his appreciation of Mozart’s playful creativity

and expression of his musical gift *in* the world, Metzger (2003: 197)^{liv} reminds us that the Christian God delights in his creatures being ...

‘... creative within human culture ... to give glory to God by simply being ... by *simply* working or playing, one glorifies God ... God is glorified in the very imaginative and enterprising acts of human creation and recreation. Before God, there is room for free play.’

Beginning with the seminal work of Dutch historian Johan Huizinga (1950) and followed by reflections from theologians (e.g., Moltmann, 1972; Johnston, 1983; Pannenberg, 1985: 323-339) and sport philosophers (e.g., Kretchmar’s chapter 8), this playful, aesthetic and creative dimension of life that is often seen in sport, has been well-documented. It seems to most readily manifest itself in fun ‘pick-up games’ and when sport competition is played in the spirit of a ‘mutual stringing together for excellence’, the etymological root meaning of the term, competition (Hyland, 1978, 1988). In the modern era, the men’s 2008 Wimbledon Tennis final (and the 2009 Australian Open final) between Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal was perhaps, an example of this. The TV commentator and ex-British number one tennis player, Andrew Castle, said of this exciting and passionate dual between two men at the height of excellence in the field, that it was not solely a demonstration of great tennis but an advert for the value and beauty of sport *itself* - it had a transcendent dimension (my paraphrase). There seemed to be a deep mutual respect between the Spaniard (Nadal) and the Swiss (Federer) and a form of humility that ironically is often only witnessed in those at the very peak of their field, in this case sport. Because, from a humanist’s standpoint, they are secure (if with a degree of *fragility*, perhaps)^{lv}, in who they are and confident in *their* abilities, *their selves*.

Sport itself could then be argued to possess a spiritual dimension, in that it seems to provide opportunity akin to what the sociologist of religion, Peter Berger (1970: 52), called ‘signals of transcendence ... within the human condition’. Indeed, the great 19th century Russian novelist, Dostoyevsky (1967/1927: 259)^{lvi}, was not ignorant to the fact that ‘the universal and everlasting craving of humanity’ is ‘to find someone to worship’ and in the sporting realm it is perhaps these ‘moments of transcendence’ and aesthetic beauty^{lvii} (amongst many other ‘earthly’ things), and the sporting demi-gods who provide them, that fit the bill. There is, however, a real danger in this *quasi*-transcendent understanding of life and sport, as poetically described by C.S. Lewis:

‘The books or the music [and sporting moments] in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not *in* them, it only came *through* them, and what came through them was longing. These things - the beauty, the memory of our own past - are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not the thing in itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from another country we have never visited ... Our lifelong nostalgia, our longing to be reunited with something in the universe from which we now feel cut off ... is no mere neurotic fancy, but the truest index of our real situation’^{lviii}

Our ‘real’ situation? In his analysis of the idol-pride interface in the human heart, in both Augustine’s autobiography, *Confessions*, and his most well-known theological work, *The City of God*, Reno (2006: 176) concludes that ‘... we wrap our love of worldly things in this

false tinsel of divinity and propose them to ourselves as idols worthy of worship. This strategy of self-deception allows us to pursue the finite goods of creaturely life as if they were images of the divine'. Similarly, when describing human's often unconscious yearning for eternity, Van Kaam (1975: 138) suggests, this leads to seeking '... something lasting amidst the transitoriness of countless self-expressions'.

It is argued that sport, could just be one such 'transitory self-expression' among many others, *if* it is an idolatrous quest and thus may lead to self-deception as to the deeper spiritual meaning of life. As C.S. Lewis contends above, if a human-being takes a 'life-project' like sport, which Christians believe is a gift from God, but mistake it '... for the thing itself they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers'. History shows that human-beings begin to consider and commit to religious faith for a whole range of reasons^{lix}, nonetheless, it is quite often only when there is, as the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber (Agassi, 1999) called it, a 'shudder of identity', when the pride and self-sufficiency of the human heart (*not* character) has been 'weakened', or what Wolfensburger (1983: 98) calls 'gentled', through an athlete's life - retirement, career-ending injury, or failure - that the deep religious-existential question might be asked: who am I without *my* abilities, *my* source of self-worth, *my* importance and status in the media, sporting sub-culture and world?

This said, I do not want to propose a *false dichotomy* in this broken and messy world and I emphasize again, personal excellence, aesthetic beauty, creativity and human achievement should be sought in all walks of life, including sport. Nelson Mandela,^{lx} in his inaugural presidential speech, conveys something of this ...

‘Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant ... talented ...? Actually, who are you *not* to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn’t serve the world. There is nothing enlightening about shrinking so that other people won’t feel insecure around you [false humility]. We were born to manifest the glory of God that is within us. It’s not just in some of us; it’s in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others’

To be sure, such inspirational words resonate deep into all our hearts but I challenge the reader to consider where this *inspiration* and *motivation* comes from? The catholic priest-psychologist, Adrian Van Kaam, I would argue was writing prophetically in 1975, when he observed that ‘we are on the rebirth of the awareness of human need for the transcendent ...’ (181). The following two quotes I then believe can *both* be true, if we ‘... seek first his kingdom and his righteousness’ (Matthew 6: 33). A recent newspaper advertisement for *Gillette*^{lxi} that features three of the sporting world’s demi-gods, Tiger Woods (until recently), Roger Federer and Thierry Henry, encourages the reader to:

‘Show the world how phenomenal you can be’.

In the gospels, the founder and cornerstone of Christianity, Jesus of Nazareth, a humble carpenter and who Christians believe to be the son of God, encourages the reader to consider where this talent came from and what *ultimately* matters ...

‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?’

Matthew 16: 24-26

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ⁱ Cited in the Foreword of Steenbergen, Knop and Elling (2001: 11)

ⁱⁱ Sports psychology is arguably 'hanging onto the coat tails' of its parent discipline in terms of introducing and accepting spiritual and religious psychologies (see Watson and Nesti, 2005). The existence of a division in the *American Psychological Association* (APA) for spiritual and religious issues and a section for transpersonal psychology in the *British Psychological Association* (BPS) and academic text books (e.g., Miller and Delaney, 2005; Shafranske, 1996) published by the APA and others on Christian psychology (Vitz, 1994, 1999, 1998), indicate the growing acceptance and need for this area of study in sport. It is important to note that the use of cognitive-behavioral consultancy techniques (Mental Skills Training), such as imagery, thought-stopping, goal-setting and relaxation methods, are foundational to the theory and practice of the discipline of sport psychology and thus are invaluable in many consultancy situations where performance enhancement is the only goal.

However, it is the *lack* of consultancy approaches that allow for deeper existential and religious concerns to be addressed (e.g., identity boundary situations, such as retirement from sport and career-ending injuries) and the exploration of the *meaning of sport* (and life) for the athlete that I would argue is a major omission from the discipline.

ⁱⁱⁱ Within the interdisciplinary literature on ‘identity’, three schools of thought (that are often in heated debate) exist—constructionists, essentialists and individualists—and all hold some value in understanding the complexities of identity. Social constructivism is particularly helpful in understanding how social forces can shape individual identity in sport, esp. in relation to the desires of those in institutions of power. See Hoover (2004, Ch 1) for an overview of the three different schools of thought and Taylor’s (1989) classic work for a comprehensive historical, sociological, philosophical and psychological account of identity formation.

^{iv} Ontology is a philosophical term that relates to questions of *being* and as Zizioulas (1991: 33) notes is ‘...specific to the problem of identity’.

^v This is certainly not to say that the existing body of empirical research and theory should not be scoured for every insight on human nature in trying to understand athletic identity in the world of sport. Sport psychologist, Mark Nesti (2007a,b,c) provides a good example of this, in his Catholic-based accounts of applied work with athletes, which also draws on the work of Frankl and others that have provided unique insight into life’s journey. The way in which Donald Capps (1987), professor of pastoral psychology, has overlaid Erikson’s Life Cycle theory with biblical narratives and the beatitudes in an attempt to more fully understand the development of Christian identity, is another good example of drawing on humanistic models, while maintaining theological and doctrinal rigor.

^{vi} All Biblical citations, unless otherwise stated, are from NIV (International Bible Society, 2002).

^{vii} Cited in Warren (2002: 80).

^{viii} Other examples of recent research on sport identity in sport psychology in able-bodied sport, are Yannick and Brewer (2007), Visek et al., (2008), Grove, Fish and Eklund (2004), Black and Smith (2007) and Warriner and Lavallo (2008) and in disability sport, Smith and Sparkes (2008) and Sparkes and Smith (2002). And in sociology, Cassidy, Jones and Potrac (2008) and Yiannakis and Melnik (2001)

^{ix} Further evidence of this is provided by the Josephson Institute, *Centre for Youth Ethics*—Character Counts projects: <http://charactercounts.org/programs/reportcard/>

^x For detailed accounts of the etymology and usage of terms such as the soul (Hebrew trans. *Nephesh* and Greek trans. *Psyche*), see Jeeves (1997: 108-111). The terms soul and mind are often used interchangeably to

collectively describe the will, intellect and emotions, which in modern psychology is commonly understood as *personality* and in Christian anthropology and psychology as *personhood* (see McFadyen, 1990; Pannenberg, 1985). The *body* is viewed as the 'temple [vehicle] of the Holy Spirit' (1 Cor. 3: 16) and as such, should not be subjugated to a lesser importance (as in Platonic-Cartesian mind-body dualism) than the other component parts, soul and spirit (i.e., holism). *Spirit* can have two meanings. First, as an 'animating' principle which creates and *gives* life (Gen. 2: 7). Second, as the Spirit of God that came upon His prophets and people in Old testament times (e.g., 1 Sam. 10:10; Num. 11: 25; 2 Kings. 2: 9) and as the Holy Spirit that came in *a new way* at Pentecost (Acts. 2: 1-41) and which *can* redeem and guide human-beings (Rom. 8: 1-17; 10: 9-13).

^{xi} *The New Bible Dictionary* (1982, cited in Jeeves, 1997: 110) describes the heart: "it was essentially the whole man, with all his attributes, physical, intellectual and psychological, of which Hebrew thought and spoke, and the heart was conceived of as the governing centre of all these...character, personality, will, mind are modern terms which all reflect something of the meaning of the 'heart' in biblical usage...mind is perhaps the closest modern term to the biblical usage of the heart". For the purposes of my analysis the term heart will be used to describe the whole person (physical, intellectual and psychological), it is important to note, however, that some scriptures suggest that the heart was principally the 'inner-life' of the human-being and does not include the body (Ezekiel 44: 7, 9). Paul also used various terms ambiguously. For example, heart—*kardia*, is used 52 times in the epistles and means character, emotional states, seat of intellectual activity, and volition. Flesh (*sarx*) is used 91 times and ranges over a number of meanings from our physical nature to a 'seat of sin.' In most places, it seems that *sarx* is used to represent the whole (sinful) person . . . not just the physical or sensuous part. Body (*soma*—89 times in the Pauline letters) likewise has a holistic meaning to it and is used more regularly to mean the entire person—along with 4 or 5 other meanings.

^{xii} An idol can be defined as any idea, person or object that is worshipped (prioritized) in the place of God (Exodus. 20: 4). Idols may include money, religion, human relationships, sports, music, sex, etc Arguably, dry, rule-governed and legalistic religion (in *both* Protestant and Catholic Christian forms and other religions) is a major idol of the modern world, in which believers (and non) may worship what C.S. Lewis (1997/1952, see pp. 102-103) called, an 'imaginary God'. Isaiah 29: 13-14, conveys this type of religion: 'The Lord says, "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up of rules taught by men"'. This is also spoken by Jesus to the Pharisees: Matthew 15: 8-9. Manning (1990) and Yancey (1997) provide two excellent corrective responses to modern legalistic Christianity and religion, by providing a biblical view of God, as a gracious and loving, but also Holy Father.

For an excellent analysis of how legalistic religion and other idols (sport included) can act as ‘massive defense mechanisms’ to authentically experiencing God through Christ, see Johnson and Burroughs (2000: 187) and Kierkegaard (1989/1849).

^{xiii} This term was cited in Middleton and Walsh (1995: 61).

^{xiv} Taylor (1989) heavily critiques this in his analysis of modern identity and it is something that is personified the writings of Murphy and White (1995) and George Leonard (1974) on the spiritual and mystical dimensions of sport, which I have critiqued elsewhere (Watson, 2007a).

^{xv} The ‘myths of progress’ that Middleton and Walsh (1995) refer to, come from the disciplines of anthropology (Feuerbach), psychology (Freud et al.), sociology (Marx and Durkheim et al.) and biology (Darwin and Dawkins). Following the completion of the ‘Genome project’ in 2000, genetic determinism has arguably become the latest mythic utopia for some. Undisputedly, some of these ideas have in varying ways led to *very positive* scientific, technological, and *some* social, advancements that we should be most thankful for. However, the point is that the proponents and followers of these utopias have often slid into idolatry, seeing them as *all-encompassing* explanations (meta-narratives) for social and cultural existence and in turn ignoring God’s guidance for how humanity should live. The history of the twentieth century *and the state of the modern world* clearly shows the folly in this view, which we are warned about in the bible (1 Cor. 1: 18-31, 2). Some of this footnote is also cited in Watson and White (2007: 219).

^{xvi} The social work and ministry of Joe Ehrmann, ex-NFL footballer, through his award-winning book (Marx, 2003) and nationally renowned organization, *Building Men and Women for Others* (see <http://www.buildingmenandwomen.org/2007/default.asp>), is an excellent initiative in America that is trying to address the issue of fatherlessness through the vehicle of sport.

^{xvii} I in *no way* devalue the mutually essential and irreplaceable role of the mother in a child’s development but as Blankenhorn (1995) argues, it is the loss of fatherhood in society that is at the root of many social ills and identity issues. Neither do I suggest in anyway that loving single parents (most often women) cannot bring up a healthy and balanced child, often in very difficult circumstances that frequently stem from the *sins of men*—often sins of omission (e.g., abdicating responsibility). But that the absence of a parent through death, emotional detachment, abandonment, neglect, divorce etc. will *unavoidably* impact upon the identity and self-worth of the child and the thinking and behavior of the adult that they will become in all realms of life, including sport. According to the Christian story this is however, nothing that cannot be healed through the love of a supernatural God, who can do *all things*, and through the care and love of others (often the vehicle for God’s

love).

^{xviii} In supporting his thesis Kohn cites the research of Jenifer Levin who interviewed competitive junior swimmers and found that the ‘love and approval of a significant parental figure’ was a major motivation to compete. For those wanting to further examine competition and winning from a specifically social-psychological angle, see Chapter 5 of Kohn’s book and Watson and White (2007).

^{xix} Sport sociologist, Martin Roderick (2006), an ex-professional footballer himself (thus an ‘insider’), has undertaken an excellent qualitative study (using symbolic interactionism) of 47 current and retired British professional footballers that touches on many issues of identity that are addressed in this chapter. This book is based on his Ph.D.

^{xx} Some theologians use the ‘rule of first mention’ when exploring the foundations of a biblical concept or aspect of human nature. Here, this points toward the fall of humanity (Gen. 3: 7) when Adam and Eve’s ‘eyes were opened’ and they needed ‘fig leaves’ to hide their nakedness as the point at which shame and guilt entered the world, as beautifully conveyed in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.

This is described in the incisive and seminal work on psychological defense mechanisms of Kierkegaard (1818/1849) and more recently by Johnson and Burroughs (2000) and Becker (1973), who argued that there is a wide-spread ‘denial of death’ (and thus need for belief in a salvific God) in the western psyche.

^{xxi} See chapters 7, 8 and 10 of McNamee’s book, which examines aspects of shame, humility and envy in sport from a mainly philosophical (esp. Greek) perspective.

^{xxii} Existential sport psychologist, Mark Nesti (2007a, 2004) who has done applied work in a number of British Premier League Football Clubs, makes the important point that ‘normal anxiety’ in sport (and life) is a healthy emotion that if ‘worked through’ appropriately can lead to a stronger sense of self, increased ‘psychological hardiness’ and performance enhancement. Conversely, ‘neurotic anxiety’ in sport, *may* lead to mental health problems and/or performance decrements due to less potential for experiencing health, well-being and optimal psychological states--*Flow-states* (Jackson and Csikszentmihalyi, 1999).

^{xxiii} In ancient culture the name of a person carried significant meaning and parents often thought very carefully when naming their child, especially in Hebrew culture. For example, the etymological root of the name Jesus, is ‘Yahweh / God saves(!)’, which conveys his earthly mission, as the God-man.

^{xxiv} Consider the clear nationalistic fervour evident in the 1936 Berlin Olympics amongst many others in the 20th century. Indeed, scholars have suggested that there are many similarities, if not in context, between the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the Nazi Olympics of 1936. To be sure, communist China’s recent exponential economic

and political growth on the world stage has been seen by many, as their quest to become the next superpower (Close, Askew and Xin, 2007). The power and political weight of modern sport is reflected in the 20th century trend of world superpowers topping the Olympic Gold medal tables. The 2008 Chinese Olympic squad did not disappoint! But the long term physical and psychological cost of brutal training regimes and unhealthy expectations from country, parents and coaches (*see* Beamish and Ritchie, 2006; Hong, 2006; Hoberman, 1992) will for many pay back with interest. Athletes and coaches like all human beings must do something with these unrealistic pressures and the perceived threat to their personhood in sport. So, what is forged in *some* is a dysfunctional and potentially destructive, co-dependent relationship with sport, with winning as the primary goal. Identity issues flow from this world-view.

^{xxv} John White (2008) has provided an in-depth analysis of idolatry in sport from a Christian theological perspective and this is also a major theme addressed in Watson and White (2007).

^{xxvi} For an interesting and informative account of *passion* in sport in relation to identity issues, see Vallerand and Miquelon (2007).

^{xxvii} For historical documentation of this development in America, see Berryman (1975).

^{xxviii} For further documentation of problems in youth sport: overtraining and physical and psychological burnout in adult, youth and child sport (Smith, Lemyre and Raedeke, 2007); eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia, esp. in 'aesthetic sports' (Burton, 2000); emotional developmental issues in the identity-forming process of childhood and adolescent sport (Begel, 2000b,c); damaging child and youth athlete training programmes and state-sponsored performance enhancing drug policies in 1960-70s communist eastern bloc countries (Hoberman, 1992); abusive Chinese elite sport youth academies in the run-up to the 2008 Beijing Olympics (Hong, 2006; Reason and Craig, 2008; BBC, 2005); negative consequences of excessive pressure and expectations to perform from parents and coaches (Hellstedt, 2000; Norton et al., 2000; Murphy, 1999; Burton, 2000; Lopiano and Zotos, 1992).

^{xxix} In support of the trenchant critique of Higgs and Braswell (2004), I argue that sport is *not* by definition formally a religion. However, worldviews function from the heart (Proverbs 4: 23) and thus any activity like sport can be used as a vehicle for trying to answer these most fundamental existential questions and which often gives rise to idolatry.

^{xxx} Harold Abrahams, in commenting on the importance of winning the 100m final, notes that 'I'm twenty-four and I've never known [contentment]. I'm forever in pursuit and I don't even know what it is I am chasing. Aubrey, old chap—I'm scared. In one hour's time, I'll be out there again. I'll raise my eyes and look down that

corridor—four feet wide with ten lonely seconds to justify my whole existence. But will I?’. In stark contrast, Eric Liddell a Scottish Rugby player and member of the Chinese missionary service and Abrahams’ competitor, comments on the meaning of the Olympic race in the oft-cited words, ‘God made me for a purpose but he also made me fast and when I run I feel his pleasure’ (see Keddie, 2007). Liddell’s life was not *principally* justified by whether he won the race, or even competed, as shown in his refusal to compete in the 100m Olympic sprint race due to its scheduling on the Sabbath, but rather first by his identity in a Father God (Rom.8: 15-17) shown by the pleasure (rather than striving) he experienced when he *surrendered* his running into the hands of his god. The themes in this footnote on the *Chariots of Fire* are taken from White and Watson (2006) and are also described by Rick Warren (2002: 69-76) in his chapter, *What makes God Smile?* (Ch. 9).

^{xxxix} Feeling God-like is a dimension of Maslow’s (1962) 19-point typology of the *Peak Experience*, which is based on humanistic psychology. It has been suggested by Ravizza (1984, 2002) and others (Murphy and White, 1995) that peak experiences in sport can have a mystical or spiritual dimension. Although acknowledging the very positive nature of these experiences in sport, both in terms of enjoyment and enhanced performance, both Higgs and Braswell (2004) and Watson (2007a) have strongly questioned the Christian theological authenticity of these mind-states, in terms of their supernatural origin and impact on understanding identity in sport.

^{xxxix} For a comparative analysis of ‘identity’ from a humanistic and Christian perspective that draws on the ideas of Augustine, Kierkegaard, Merton, Pascal and Rahner etc., see Morea (1997).

^{xxxix} Isaiah 9: 1-7; 52: 13-15; 53: 1-12.

^{xxxix} The first century Jewish historian, Josephus, documents some of what occurred in the gospels (Jewish History) in his work, in particular in his book, *Antiquities of the Jews* (c. 94.).

^{xxxix} For those wishing to more fully understand the redemptive story of Christianity, see the Hollywood movie, directed by Mel Gibson, *The Passion of the Christ*.

^{xxxix} See chapter 10 and 13 of McGrath (2001). The doctrine of atonement explains how following the separation of God the Father (creator) from humans (creatures) at the fall of humanity (Genesis 3), in which humans in their *pride, wilfully chose* to disobey God’s will for their lives, God the Father mercifully sent his Son, the second person of the trinity, the ‘sacrificial lamb’, to *atone* for the sins of humanity. This, it is argued in Christian thought, was so that God the Father could come back into a relationship with his creatures (humans)--*at-one-ment*—and offer eternal life, deep joy and a ‘peace...which transcends all understanding’ (Philippians 4: 7a).

^{xxxix} Following the European enlightenment and the rise of science, the rationalistic western mindset often finds

it difficult to accept paradox in life (e.g., love and suffering or dying to self to *gain self in Christ*), as shown in the platonic dualistic anthropology / theology (versus Hebrew and Pauline) of much of the American Protestant Church, which in turn significantly impacts upon their approach to sport (see Watson, 2007b and 1 Corinthians 1: 22). Conversely, the middle-eastern (e.g., Hebrew-Jewish) people historically have been much more comfortable with the paradoxes of life.

^{xxxviii} Cited in Warren (2002: 80).

^{xxxix} The bible records that the Holy Spirit was sent to the earth after Jesus' 'ascension' to His father (it is stated that he conquered death through the cross and *resurrection*) as described in Acts 1 and 2. Following the coming of the Holy Spirit (often called Jesus Spirit, as it is the same thing in essence), it is the Holy Spirit that is the relational source between God and Christians (e.g., communication in prayer is *through* the Holy Spirit that lives in the Christian believer, see Romans 8: 11).

^{xl} The first half of this quote is taken from the back-cover of Townsend's book. While I heartily support the general theme of this book, there are some elements of it that I would question in terms of orthodox Christian doctrine, which the author himself acknowledges. For another similar account of 'Strength through Weakness' and brokenness in Christian living, see Clements (1994).

^{xli} I am sure that this all seems too simple, neat and unrealistic for some readers, due to the *fact* that *some* non-Christians are generally 'nicer' in terms of how they relate to others and may cope better with adversity and suffering in sport. Christian identity is not 'first' predicated on how 'nice' a person is, but rather *belief* and *faith* in Jesus Christ (John. 6: 29; Romans. 10: 9). The biblical story of the repentant thief that was crucified next to Jesus (Luke. 23: 40-43) clearly demonstrates this. Importantly, however, after making the *conscious decision* to believe and follow Christ, a person *should* actively seek to become more 'Christ-like' in their life-journey, hopefully exhibiting the fruits of the spirit (Galatians. 5:22-25; 1 Corinthians. 13: 4-7) *and* operating powerfully in the gifts of the Holy Spirit as *given* to each individual (1 Corinthians. 12: 14). *Both* these are hallmarks (esp. humility and love) of Christian maturity. For an accessible overview of this point, see Chapter 11, *Nice People or New Men*, of Lewis's *Mere Christianity* (1997/1952) and McClung (2005).

^{xlii} For example, see Morphew (1991): the state of the 'already, not yet' in kingdom theology, relates to the paradoxical idea that the kingdom of God has already come in the first coming of Jesus Christ in his life, death and resurrection (it is inaugurated) but it is also *not yet* in that the kingdom of God won't be fully realised (consummated) until Christ's second coming (see the book of Revelation, 21, 22).

^{xliii} The protestant theological concept (strongly Calvinistic) idea of *Common Grace*, which is different to *Saving*

Grace (salvation through belief in the work of Christ), is an idea that God gave all humans (believers or not) grace for the common good of all mankind (so they could operate relationally in society and develop). The scholar Louis Berkhof (1996: 434) suggests common grace ‘...curbs the destructive power of sin, maintains in a measure the moral order of the universe, thus making an orderly life possible, distributes in varying degrees gifts and talents among men, promotes the development of science and art, and showers untold blessings upon the children of men’.

^{xliv} Hubbard’s (1998) book provides a number of testimonies of athletes, who after coming into a relationship with God, found a deep peace (a centeredness) that subsequently lead to enhanced performance and enjoyment (and, I would argue ability get into Flow states / being-in-the-zone), due to reduced anxiety of failure and others’ expectations, etc.

^{xlv} See also, Schwobel and Gunton (1991), Lints, Horton and Talbot (2006), Towner (2005), Krause (2005), Jeeves (1997), Kaplan and Schwartz (1997) and a special edition of the *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* (1998, Vol 26, No. 1).

^{xlvi} See *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, the *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* (that has published work on prayer in sport contexts), the *Journal of Psychology and Judaism* and the recent text of Miller and Delaney (2005). The work of psychologists Paul Vitz (1999, 1998, 1994) and Vitz and Felch (2006), Peter Morea (1997) and Donald Capps (1987, using Erikson), the prophetic insights on human nature of Oswald Chambers (1922, 1962/1936), the reflections of catholic priest-psychologist Adrian Van Kaam (1975), and the writings of Swiss psychiatrist Paul Tournier (e.g., 1957; Collins, 1973) should all be of assistance in forming a sound understanding of Christian psychology. As I have argued, the doctrine of the ‘Fatherhood of God’ is also central to understanding Christian identity in sport, thus the writings of Floyd McClung (2005), Mark Stibbe (1999) and Christopher Wright (2007), will be useful in synthesizing psychological and theological ideas.

^{xlvii} Cited in Warren (2002: 17).

^{xlviii} The potential socio-legal issues that may arise from genetic enhancement in sport may well be a line for future research, although not related directly to theology or genetics in sport, Parker’s (2009) work provides a start point for examining issues of identity in sport from a legal angle. The recent book by Hundley and Billings (2009) that examines identity in sports media, could also be helpful in analysing how ‘super-athletes / celebrities’ identity is formed and portrayed—*hyperreality*?

^{xlix} For the official site of John Wooden see <http://www.coachwooden.com/>

ⁱ Simply defined, prayer is talking to and listening to God. There is a growing body of research and writings on the use and value of prayer in sport in ways that relate to athletic identity issues, i.e., to provide deeper meaning to sport participation, as a coping strategy to reduce neurotic anxiety etc. Notable sports psychology, sports science and sport sociology journals have published empirical research (Park, 2000; Vernacchia et al., 2000; Czech and Bullet, 2007; Lee, 2006) and reviews of literature and essays (Watson and Nesti, 2005; Watson and Czech, 2005) that have identified the use of, and value of, prayer in sporting contexts and sport psychology consultancy. This is in addition to empirical research published in religious psychology journals (Czech et al., 2004; Murray et al., 2005) and one article on the ethics of using prayer in organized sport (Kreider, 2003).

ⁱⁱ The spiritual gifts, as described in 1 Corinthians 12, are wisdom, faith, healing, prophecy, tongues, miracles etc.

ⁱⁱⁱ The fruits of the spirit listed in Galatians 5: 22-23 are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Why I make the point that the fruits of the spirit are *foundational* to the powerful and authentic use of the spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12), is because the gifts of the spirit can be elevated to be seen as more important than the fruits, or they can be misused and abused by individuals whose Christian character (in humility, love and wisdom) is lacking. The key thing is that the fruits of the spirit and the gifts of the spirit should operate in harmony, as they did in the life of Jesus (see Johnson, 2009).

ⁱⁱⁱⁱ This article is re-printed in this book.

^{lv} Van Kaam (1975: 145), in discussing our 'spiritual calling' in Christ suggests, 'a person like Mozart could find out that musical self-expression is so much a part of the incarnation of his life call that the refusal to express himself musically in any way at any time could be an infidelity to his identity'. Null (2008) has done an excellent job of analysing 'life-calling', for elite / professional sportspersons.

^{lv} It is interesting to consider that ironically the dynamic between Federer and Nadal, may also have been shaped by an intense 'fragility' of their identities, in that when one reaches the elite level it is precisely the fear of being beaten; that is, being knocked off the precipice of sporting domination, that demands a sense of humility (or caution?) with an opponent.

^{lvi} Cited in Metzger (2003: 188).

^{lvii} See Dubay (1999) for an excellent analysis of how beauty in the world, in both creation and human endeavours, points to God. The recent work Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (2006) on athletic beauty is also a good source for examining this topic.

^{lviii} This quote from Lewis's book, *Transposition and Other Addresses* (Ch. 2), was cited in Kilby (1968: 22-23).

^{lix} Some people inherit religious faith from their parents and then often make a ‘personal’ commitment as they move through adolescence into adulthood, others have powerful ‘Damascus road’ religious experiences like the apostle Paul, others through study and reasoning come to accept faith and make a willful commitment (e.g., C.S. Lewis), some are deeply influenced by others around them (the testimony of their lives) who already have faith and then begin to ask questions and read and prayer, others cry out to God in times of need when they are brought ‘to the end of themselves’ (often in a life crisis, when a human-being begins to ask questions of meaning). A key thing to note here, is that regardless of the journey a person takes to faith and in turn making a commitment to follow Christ (see Romans 10: 8-10) it is *only* by the leading / beckoning of the Holy Spirit that the Father draws a human-being back to Himself (i.e., to make a commitment).

^{lx} Cited in Mason (1999).

^{lxi} See *Gillette Mens Razors & Blades Range - Gillette Fusion Roger, Thierry And Tiger*, Available: <http://www.visit4info.com/advert/Gillette-Fusion-Roger-Thierry-And-Tiger-Gillette-Mens-Razors-Blades-Range/55260>