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## Perceived Influence of the Church towards Character Building and Promoting Integrity in Sports

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### ABSTRACT

*Christianity has been viewed by many to have a distance relationship with sports due to its religious practice of holiness and virtues, creating a disparity between it and sport which is viewed by many as an avenue for ungodly practices. Studies on sports participation have found that sports have both positive and negative influence on character building. The Church, being an embodiment of Christ, is perceived to be a tool for building character, virtue and integrity. Its role in producing a godly individual is therefore examined in the sports setting. The study therefore investigates the perceived influence of the Church towards character building and promoting integrity in sports. The study adopted the descriptive research method. The population for the study were all Christians (Catholics and Protestants) in Lagos State, Nigeria. The sample size was two thousand five hundred (2,500) participants that were sampled from Churches in some selected L.G.As in Lagos State. A self-structured questionnaire was used in the research to extract responses. The statistical tool of percentages and Chi-square at 0.05 level of significance were used to analyse the data collected. The results of the study will be reported at the end of the study.*

### INTRODUCTION

Throughout human history, sports and religion have been closely linked. Like religion, sports convey important lessons about values and culturally appropriate behavior. The lessons they teach are similar, and both religion and sports use symbols as their primary means of communication. In most of the contemporary world, however, religion and sports occupy separate but complementary conceptual realms (Encyclopedia.com, 2019). Religion and sports have been built upon a positive ethos of commitment to hard work, personal sacrifice, fairness and achievement. They both incorporate the use of rituals and customs and it is common to see the invocation of God in training, team meetings and in the celebration of success and even failure (Rampersad, 2018). At times, sports have served the objectives of religious authorities and have been imbued with a morality and philosophy derived from religious doctrine. It has been utilised as a means to evangelize and to convert non-believers.

According to Edwards (1973) cited in sociology.iresearchnet.com, “the Ancient Olympics emerged from the ritual celebration of Zeus, the king of the Ancient Greek pantheon of gods, with the first event, the stade, recorded as part of the festivities in 776 BC. In other regions, religious or ritualised practices influenced athletic contests, including the ancient Mayan culture in Central America, where priests presided over ball games on playing grounds adjacent to their temples. In Japan, the ritualised aspects of sumo wrestling borrow extensively from the national religion, Shinto. Christianity, however, has most influenced modern conceptions of sport using sport to construct generations of strong, fit, Muscular Christians”. The closer relationship between religious and sporting ideologies was in part responsible for the reconfiguration of Jesus from effeminate and fragile to strong and robust, a more inspiring athletic figure.

This mission is apparent in both early Christian organisations that provided sporting opportunities for its members, such as the Young Men’s Christian Association, as well as in contemporary evangelism that utilises sports and sporting organisations as a means to preach to and/or convert adherents. The inclusion of a physical education curriculum to complement the intellectual and moral training already in place elevated sport from a mere corporeal activity to one with a moral and ethical philosophy. In short, sport was employed specifically to teach boys qualities that would transfer to other aspects of life, and as such became a training ground to produce morally and physically competent civic leaders.

Sports can be a platform for evangelism or a classroom for morality, but they are first and foremost a playground for receiving and enjoying the goodness of the Creator. They are a part of God’s

good design for the flourishing of his image bearers as they develop and delight in God's creation. But, of course, things are not the way they are supposed to be. In a world ravished by sin, sports are not outside of its devastating effects. Sin not only fractures our relationship with God, it shatters the goodness of God's created order, including God's design for play and sports. It amounts to either taking a good thing and twisting it into a bad thing (sin as immorality) or taking a good thing and making it an ultimate thing (sin as idolatry); becoming a playground for violence (bench-clearing brawls), cheating (corked bats, deflated footballs, etc.), injury (especially life-threatening and brain-damaging injuries), performance-enhancing drugs (haunting whole sports such as baseball, cycling, and track), and the win-at-all-costs mentality that leaves in its wake broken families, compromised integrity, and wounded friendships (Treat, 2015).

The sportsmanship in sport had slowly been declined by this 'monetary' influence. What they expect is winning and success to the team. This is true with the professionals; the more they win, the richer they are. In fact, winning will invite more and more sporting goods and companies wanting to sponsor them for advertising purposes. However, on the positive side, one has to realize that to be a world class athlete, they have to prepare themselves by training hard mentally and physically, be disciplined and committed in training and competition. This perseverance is also considered as positive character (Fauzee, Nazarudin, Yudha, Sutresna, Duangkrai, Wipoj, Rozita & Geok, 2012).

The Church sees in sport a gymnasium of the spirit, a means to exercise moral education; and because of this it admires, approves, and encourages the practice of sports in its various forms— youth sports whose practice harmonically develops the body in its physical potential, as well as the competitive sport. As John Paul II noted, "Christian life is like a rather demanding sport, combining all a person's energies to direct them towards the perfection of character, towards a goal which realizes in our humanity 'the measure of Christ's gift' (Eph 4:7)". Paul VI saw sports as a way to teach moral education and asceticism, stating: "There is not a better school for teaching fairness than the exercise of sport for it despises any attempt of cheating as unsportsmanlike. And what asceticism! What an antidote against laziness, indolence and idleness. There is no teacher more demanding than that of sport! How much discipline, how much sacrifice, how much self-dominion, courage, and tenacity is required (Lixey, Müller & Schäfer, 2020).

The core identity of a Christian is that he or she is "in Christ" by the work of the Spirit. This truth flows from the fountain of the gospel: the Christian's identity is based not on their performance but on God's grace. One is not a soccer player who happens to be a Christian. He or she is a Christian who plays soccer. The follower of Jesus does not need to build an identity through their accomplishments, for they have been given an identity because of Jesus's accomplishment. Sports matter, but they must be understood from the right perspective. Because of the gospel, we are not defined by our sin nor by our success, but by our savior. The gospel gives the sportsperson a new purpose, a new identity, and lastly a new ethic. The win-at-all-costs mentality of modern sports (where winning is an idol by which the athlete is willing to sacrifice anything else) comes at a high price to the integrity of sports (Treat, 2015). Therefore, understanding *God's* character might shape how we make our decisions. (We have especially looked at God's love, justice and holiness). Looking at how God's character is shaping *our* characters. As Christians, the main aim is to become more holy, just and loving people, so that these characteristics becoming ingrained in us as default settings (Mackenzie & Wayne, 2010).

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Sports has been rejected for its secular, corporeal emphasis and its capacity to divert attention from godly activities, and has also represented a threat to the social and moral order. As such, religion has had an indelible impact on modern sport, and sport has been both embraced and rejected by religious authorities across the centuries. In Nigerian today, there is growing evidence that people who engage in sports path the way leading to immoralities as the male commits themselves in various act ranging from piercing their ears, plaiting their hairs, using performance enhancement drugs, practicing paganism, gambling, cheating, and developing deep love for their sports instead of being more spiritual. As the popular Evangelist in Nigeria by name Funmilayo Adebayo (a.k.a Mummy G.O.) will say "those who play football will go to hell". This was based on her assumption and overall negative or dismissive view of sports itself as being evil.

## Hypotheses

The two hypotheses below were tested in the study:

1. There will be no significant difference in respondents' perception on the church as a tool towards character building in sports.
2. There will be no significant difference in respondents' perception on the church, as a tool for promoting integrity in sports.

## METHODOLOGY

The descriptive research design was used in this study. The population for the study was all Christians (Catholics and Protestants) in Lagos state, Nigeria. The sample size was two thousand five hundred (2,500) participants that were sampled from Churches in some selected LGAs in Lagos State. A self-structured questionnaire was used in the research to extract responses. The statistical tool of percentages and Chi-square at 0.05 level of significance was used to analyze the data collected.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Table 1: The church as a tool towards character building in sports**

	Items	SA	A	D	SD
1.	During sports participation, Christian athletes display good identity they learn from the gospel.	614 (24.6)	975 (39)	416 (16.6)	495 (19.8)
2.	The Christian athletes and players are not a reflection of what Christianity preaches.	427 (17)	800 (32)	545 (21.8)	728 (29.1)
3.	The church can play an important role in lifestyle and behavior of sportsmen and women.	896 (35.8)	741 (29.6)	271 (10)	592 (23.7)
4.	Aggressive athletes who found a new faith in Christianity display a change in character, approach and decision-making in situations which they could have reacted negatively to during sports competitions.	972 (38.9)	624 (24.9)	416 (16.7)	488 (19.5)
5.	Christianity can improve the attitude, character and behavior of sportsmen and women.	1045 (41.8)	799 (31.9)	452 (18.1)	204 (8.2)
6.	Most Christian athletes do not cheat in sports due to the Church teachings on fairness and truthfulness.	429 (17.2)	592 (23.7)	624 (24.9)	855 (34.2)
7.	Majority of the sportsmen and women caught using drugs and engaging in wrong practices are Christians.	209 (8.4)	556 (22.2)	945 (37.8)	790 (31.6)
8.	The Church does shape the concept and mindset of athletes as they attribute their performance and success to God during sporting events.	362 (14.5)	998 (39.9)	1040 (41.6)	100 (4)
9.	Sports cannot be related to Christianity due to carnality and corruption observed in it.	857 (34.3)	909 (36.4)	413 (16.5)	321 (12.8)
10.	One's decision to abide to rules and behave right in sports is not related to their religious background.	762 (30.5)	804 (32.2)	234 (9.3)	700 (28)
	Total	6,573	7,798	5,356	5,273

From table 1 above, it showed that on item number 1, 614 (24.6%) of the total respondents strongly agreed to the questionnaire statements that during sports participation, Christian athletes display good identity learned from the gospel, 975 (39%) agreed, 416 (16.6%) disagree while 495 (19.8%) strongly disagreed. On item number 2, 427 (17%) of the respondents strongly agreed that Christian athletes and players are not a reflection of what Christianity preaches; 800 (32%) agreed; 545 (21.8%) disagreed while 728 (29.1%) strongly disagreed. On item number 3, 896 (35.8%) of the respondents strongly agreed that the Church can play an important role in lifestyle and behavior of sportsmen and women; 741 (29.6%) agreed, 271 (10.8%) disagreed while 592 (23.7%) strongly disagreed. On item number 4, 972 (38.9%) of the respondents strongly agreed to the statement that aggressive athletes who found a new faith in Christianity display a change in character, approach and decision-making in situations which they could have reacted negatively to during sports competitions, 624 (24.9%) agreed, 416 (16.7%) disagreed while 488

(19.5%) strongly disagreed. On item number 5, 1045 (41.8%) of the total respondents strongly agreed that Christianity can improve the attitude, character and behavior of sportsmen and women, 799 (31.9%) agreed, 452 (18.1%) disagreed while 204 (8.2%) strongly disagreed.

On item number 6, 429 (17.2%) of the total respondents strongly agreed that most Christian athletes do not cheat in sports due to the Church teachings on fairness and truthfulness, 592 (23.7%) agreed, 624 (24.9%) disagreed while 855 (34.2%) strongly disagreed. On item number 7, 209 (8.4%) of the respondents strongly agreed that majority of the sportsmen and women caught using drugs and engaging in wrong practices are Christians, 556 (22.2%) agreed, 945 (37.8%) disagreed, while 790 ((31.6%) strongly disagreed. On item 8, 362 (14.5%) of the respondents strongly agreed that the Church does shape the concept and mindset of athletes as they attribute their performance and success to God during sporting events, 998 (39.9%) agreed, 1040 (41.6%) disagreed while 100 (4%) strongly agreed. On item 9, 857 (34.3%) of the total respondents strongly agreed that sports cannot be related to Christianity due to carnality and corruption observed in it, 909 (36.4%) agreed, 413 (16.5%) disagreed while 321 (12.8%) strongly disagreed. On item 10, 762 (30.5%) of the respondents strongly agreed that one's decision to abide to rules and behave right in sports is not related to their religious background, 804 (32.2%) agreed, 234 (9.3%) disagreed while 700 (28%) strongly disagreed.

Hypothesis 1: There will be no significant difference in respondents' perception on the church as a tool towards character building in sports.

**Table 2: Chi-square summary table on the perception on the church as a tool towards character building in sports**

Response	Frequency	Percentage	Df	Table Value	$\chi^2$ Value
Strongly Agreed	6,573	26.3	27	40.113	396.7
Agreed	7,798	31.2			
Disagreed	5,356	21.4			
Strongly Disagreed	5,273	21.1			
Grand Total	25,000	100			

Significant Level = 0.05, df = 27,  $\chi^2_{\text{tab}} = 40.113$

Table 2 shows the Chi-square for there will be no significant difference in respondents' perception on the church as a tool towards character building in sports. The calculated result  $\chi^2_{\text{cal}} = 396.7 > \chi^2_{\text{tab}} = 24.995$  indicated a significant difference in participants' responses. Therefore, the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) which states that there will be no significant difference in respondents' perception on the church as a tool towards character building in sports, is therefore rejected.

**Table 3: The church, a tool for promoting integrity in sports**

	Items	SA	A	D	SD
11.	Developing moral behaviour in sports is a Christian's way of exhibiting the life of Christ.	714 (28.6)	580 (23.2)	472 (18.8)	734 (29.4)
12.	Athletes learn to maintain good reputation from the Church's doctrine and transfers this to sports situation.	521 (20.8)	500 (20)	688 (27.5)	791 (31.6)
13.	Christians in sports do not show honesty and sincerity when it comes to decision making in sports as they lie to win at all cost.	352 (14.1)	822 (32.9)	624 (24.9)	702 (28.1)
14.	The Church teaching on respect for one another can be seen practiced by Christian professional athletes in sports competitions.	609 (24.4)	856 (34.2)	602 (24.1)	433 (17.3)
15.	Being a Christian does not guarantee that an athlete will not engage in cheating and substance abuse.	812 (32.5)	737 (29.5)	400 (16)	551 (22)



	Items	SA	A	D	SD
16.	Good ethics and values in sports is most-ly demonstrated by Christian athletes who have been taught by the Church to demonstrate God's value on earth.	769 (30.8)	598 (23.7)	422 (16.9)	711 (28.4)
17.	Religious athletes maintain their dedication to God by displaying integrity even during sports participation.	872 (34.9)	1001 (40)	107 (4.3)	520 (20.8)
18.	The spirit of sportsmanship is a translation of the Church's teaching on loving one's neighbor as one's self.	585 (23.4)	690 (27.6)	641 (25.6)	584 (23.4)
19.	Christianity does not promote integrity in sports due to the strong influence of sports on sports-men and women.	720 (28.9)	616 (24.6)	753 (30.1)	411 (16.4)
20.	The assumption that the Church encourages its members to live a decent life also applies to sports life and context.	553 (22.1)	821 (32.7)	640 (25.8)	486 (19.4)
	Total	6,507	7,221	5,349	5,923

From table 3 above, it showed that on item number 11, 714 (28.6%) of the total respondents strongly agreed to the questionnaire statements that developing moral behavior in sports is a Christian's way of exhibiting the life of Christ, 580 (23.2%) agreed, 472 (18.8%) disagree while 734 (29.4%) strongly disagreed. On item number 12, 521 (20.8%) of the respondents strongly agreed that athletes learn to maintain good reputation from the Church's doctrine and transfers this to sports situation; 500 (20%) agreed; 688 (27.5%) disagreed while 791 (31.6%) strongly disagreed. On item number 13, 352 (14.1%) of the respondents strongly agreed that Christians in sports do not show honesty and sincerity when it comes to decision making in sports as they lie to win at all cost; 822 (32.9%) agreed, 624 (24.9%) disagreed while 702 (28.1%) strongly disagreed. On item number 14, 600 (24.4%) of the respondents strongly agreed to the statement that the Church teaching on respect for one another can be seen practiced by Christian professional athletes in sports competitions, 856 (34.2%) agreed, 602 (24.1%) disagreed while 433 (17.3%) strongly disagreed. On item number 15, 812 (32.5%) of the total respondents strongly agreed that being a Christian does not guarantee that an athlete will not engage in cheating and substance abuse, 737 (29.5%) agreed, 400 (16%) disagreed while 551 (22%) strongly disagreed.

On item number 16, 769 (30.8%) of the total respondents strongly agreed that good ethic and values in sports is mostly demonstrated by Christian athletes who have been taught by the Church to demonstrate God's value on earth, 598 (23.9%) agreed, 422 (16.9%) disagreed while 711 (28.4%) strongly disagreed. On item number 17, 872 (34.9%) of the respondents strongly agreed that religious athletes maintain their dedication to God by displaying integrity even during sports participation, 1001 (40%) agreed, 107 (4.3%) disagreed, while 520 (20.8%) strongly disagreed. On item 18, 585 (23.4%) of the respondents strongly agreed that the spirit of sportsmanship is a translation of the Church's teaching on loving one's neighbor as one's self, 690 (27.6%) agreed, 641 (25.6%) disagreed while 584 (23.4%) strongly agreed. On item 19, 720 (28.9%) of the total respondents strongly agreed that Christianity does not promote integrity in sports due to the strong influence of sports on sportsmen and women, 616 (24.6%) agreed, 753 (30.1%) disagreed while 411 (16.4%) strongly disagreed. On item 20, 553 (22.1%) of the respondents strongly agreed that the assumption that the Church encourages its members to live a decent life also applies to sports life and context, 821 (32.7%) agreed, 640 (25.8%) disagreed while 486 (19.4%) strongly disagreed.

Hypothesis 2: There will be no significant difference in respondents' perception on the church, as a tool for promoting integrity in sports.

**Table 4: Chi-square summary table on the perception on the church, as a tool for promoting integrity in sports**

Response	Frequency	Percentage	Df	Table Value	$\chi^2$ Value
Strongly Agreed	6,507	26	27	40.113	153.3
Agreed	7,221	28.9			
Disagreed	5,349	21.4			
Strongly disagreed	5,923	23.7			
Grand Total	25,000	100			

Significant Level = 0.05, df = 27,  $\chi^2_{\text{tab}} = 40.113$

Table 4 shows the chi-square for there will be no significant difference in respondents' perception on the church, as a tool for promoting integrity in sports. The calculated result  $\chi^2_{\text{cal}} = 153.3 > \chi^2_{\text{tab}} = 24.995$  indicated a significant difference in participants' responses. Therefore, the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) which states that there will be no significant difference in respondents' perception on the church, as a tool for promoting integrity in sports is therefore rejected.

## DISCUSSION

From the result of the analysis presented, the following findings emerged:

The result indicated that majority of the respondents believed that the church is a tool for positive behaviour. Also, the test of hypothesis 1, using Chi-square, indicated that there is a significant difference in respondents' perception on the church as a tool towards character building in sports. This is in agreement with Fauzee, Nazarudin, et al. (2012), that to be a world class athlete they have to prepare themselves by training hard mentally and physically, and be disciplined and committed in training and competition. This perseverance is also considered as positive character. Also, as John Paul II noted, "Christian life is like a rather demanding sport, combining all a person's energies to direct them towards the perfection of character, towards a goal which realizes in our humanity 'the measure of Christ's gift' (Eph 4:7).

The analysis in Table 3 revealed that a large percentage of respondents believed that the church is tool for promoting integrity in sport. Hence, using Chi-square to test the hypothesis 2, the study indicated that there was a significant difference in respondents' perception on the church as a tool for promoting integrity in sports. The finding is in agreement with Treat (2015), who stated that "the core identity of a Christian is that he or she is 'in Christ' by the work of the Spirit. This truth flows from the fountain of the gospel: the Christian's identity is based not on their performance, but on God's grace. One is not a soccer player who happens to be a Christian. He or she is a Christian who plays soccer. The follower of Jesus does not need to build an identity through their accomplishments, for they have been given an identity because of Jesus's accomplishment. Sports matter, but they must be understood from the right perspective. Because of the gospel, we are not defined by our sin nor by our success, but by our savior. The gospel gives the sportsperson a new purpose, a new identity, and lastly a new ethic".

## CONCLUSION

As much as there is a need to develop the spirit of sportsmanship among players / athletes, and fairness in officiating among the official, the Church has a big role to play in sports. It is the tool that teaches the need to develop good character and integrity in sports. It can be used to evangelize the gospel of Christ, making it clear to Christian sportsmen and women that being a Christian and a sportsperson is a good platform to display the character of Christ in them and minister to the nonbelievers through their behaviours and actions. The gospels of the Church, if well followed and abide to by Christian athlete, the issues of substance abuse, cheating, violent, wining at all cost syndrome among many will all be a thing of the past. Therefore, sports should be embraced by the Church as a channel for evangelism in other to reach out to a larger audience/congregation and to preach the gospel of character and integrity.

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