

## Play by the Rules

When it comes to sport on the world stage it is well known that Australia punches far above its weight. Australians are sport-mad! In Brisbane, for example, River City catamarans are wrapped with the colours of favourite sporting teams!

Sport includes all forms of usually competitive physical activities or games. It largely centres on the physical ability and skills of the players, providing enjoyment to individual athletes and teams, and entertainment for spectators. Codes of conduct and rules are key to sport for, without these, there is no meaningful game. Rules count. When they are wantonly broken the reputations of the sport and the role model athletes are tarnished and we rapidly lose interest.

For junior sport the Australian Sports Commission website has codes of behaviour for players, parents, coaches, teachers, administrators, officials, media, and spectators. The first item in the code for young players is *“Play by the rules”!* The final item for young players is *“respect the rights, dignity and worth of all participants regardless of gender, ability, cultural background, or religion.”* This strongly echoes the Judeo-Christian belief that every person has dignity and worth because each one of us is created in the image of God.

## God Wants People to Live by His Rules

God created the first man and woman in His own image and placed them *“in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it”* (Genesis 2:15). It was a place where they could enjoy communion with God by walking and talking with Him in the cool of the day. Adam and Eve needed their bodies to relate to God and do what He wanted them to do. Though God is spirit, many believe that the human body is integral to the image of God in man. Selwyn Hughes stated,

*“all our capacities function in a physical frame. Our body functions as the mortal instrument of our immortal spirit”.*

God gave a single rule for living in the Garden of Eden: *“You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die”* (Genesis 2:16-17). But why would God place a tree in the garden and then forbid Adam and Eve to eat from it? The one forbidden tree provided an exercise in choice. There were rewards for choosing to obey God’s rule, and consequences and penalties for choosing to disobey. Sadly, the serpent tempted Adam and Eve to break God’s rule and eat the forbidden fruit.

## Running the Race

Paul often compared the Christian life to running a race. To new believers he said, *“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize”.* (1 Corinthians 9:24). To a young Timothy he wrote *“anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor’s crown except by competing according to the rules”* (2 Timothy 2:5). Indeed, the drama of sport mirrors the drama of our lives. Could Paul’s repeated illustration show that sport is a means to glorify and give pleasure to God?

## Sport Begins With Play

Physical activity is vital for a child’s development and lays the foundation for a healthy and active life. The best form of physical activity for kids is play! Play is more than just fun. It’s how they learn, and how they work out who they are, how the world works and where they fit into it. To describe the future reign of Jesus God said *“the city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there”* (Zechariah 8:5). This beautiful picture shows us that God delights in children at play.

From the time a baby plays peekaboo with its mother he or she is learning about relationships. Play teaches children about taking turns and how to have fun. Children learn about being a leader and being a follower. They learn how to handle their emotions to get on well with others. They learn about following rules and setting boundaries. For older children sport is a continuation of play. In sport young adults enter into the discipline of training and test their limits.

## Tested Faith

Many believe that Michael Jones was the greatest ever player to pull on the famous All Blacks jersey. A deeply committed Christian, there was almost a predestination about his All Blacks career. In 1987, in his All Blacks debut, in the first Rugby World Cup match ever played, he scored the very first try! Michael Jones is remembered for his legendary calm



and leadership qualities and his refusal to play on Sunday, the day he *“put aside for God and my family”*. Although he was selected for the 1987 and 1991 All Black RWC squads, Jones missed three Sunday games in the 1991 tournament. He was then omitted from the 1995 squad as he would have been unavailable for the quarterfinal and semi-final games. He shared in an interview that *“this is one*

way of showing that God is really important to me". At the height of his playing career he had a horrific knee injury. Everyone thought this was the end but Michael exercised his faith in God and made a full recovery! There are no regrets as he looks back, but it was testing.

### The Spoiling of Sport

God intended sport for good but the enemy of those made in the image of God is a spoil sport. Today some sports are sponsored by gambling and beer - played more and more on Sundays and religious holidays - peppered with profanity, blasphemy and racial slurs - tainted by doping and performance enhancing drugs - marred by violent incidents involving drunken fans - tarnished by players who misbehave on and off the field. Indeed for many fans, sport has become their god.

Dear Father, thank You for creating us with bodies that are fearfully and wonderfully made. Thank You for the joy and exhilaration of playing and watching sport. Thank You for those who desire to use their athletic gifts to bring glory to You. Protect sport from the evil one who is doing his utmost to spoil it. Help us to redeem sport that You may delight in it and use it to strengthen our society. In Jesus' Name I pray. Amen.

### About 'Image of God' Leaflets

In the Bible we read that God "*created man in His own image*" (Genesis 1:27). Many maintain that all human history revolves around this truth. The Judeo-Christian belief in the unique dignity of human beings is at the very foundation of Western civilisation.

The 2010 Canberra Declaration therefore states:

*"We believe that all human life, being made in the image of God, has intrinsic and equal value from conception to life's natural end."*

'Image of God' leaflets relate the doctrine of man as created in the image of God to various issues we face in Australia today.

The 21 leaflets in SERIES ONE are dedicated to Sophie Scholl who was martyred at the age of 21 in World War II for writing and distributing leaflets.

You can download other 'Image of God' leaflets at The Canberra Declaration website.

Please:

### READ & SIGN

The Canberra Declaration  
to Protect

- *Religious Freedom*
- *Marriage and Family and*
- *Human Life*  
in Australia

Website: [www.canberradeclaration.org.au](http://www.canberradeclaration.org.au)

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## Leaflet 6

# Sport



and the  
**Image of  
God**