

Sports Clichés to Avoid Using

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As we serve the men and women of sport, the words we use should be purposeful, grace-filled, loving, and helpful. There are a myriad of sports clichés which don't fit the previous description and that we should avoid using. Some of them follow.

“It's just a game.” This cliché simply diminishes the value of every hour of training, every year of achievement, and every deep longing in the heart of a competitive sportsperson. Please don't insult them by using this cliché.

“**IF YOU AIN'T CHEATING, YOU AIN'T TRYING.**” This would seem obvious, but many who participate in sport think it's not wrong if one doesn't get caught. They equate breaking the rules with maximum effort to compete and to win. Let's not use this language and let's not encourage its accompanying attitude.

“**SECOND PLACE IS THE FIRST LOSER.**” This is the crass, foolish, younger brother to “win at all costs.” It is more blunt and adds the label “loser” to anyone who doesn't finish first. Let's not fall prey to this foolish attitude which diminishes the value of everyone who competes, but doesn't finish in first place.

“**THE OFFICIALS STOLE THAT ONE FROM US.**” If we would confess, most of us have harbored this sentiment, even if it's not been expressed openly. Too often we ascribe ignoble motives to officials, think they're fools, or worse. If one really understands sport, he certainly knows that there are far more mistakes and errors committed by the players and coaches than are ever committed by the officiating crew. Most games are won or lost by the players, not the umpire, linesman, referee, or judge.

“YOU DESERVE THIS _____ (FILL IN THE BLANK).” This thought has taken the USA captive over the last five years. It has polluted our sports culture with entitlement and foolishness. Parents, sportswriters, broadcasters, pastors, and even chaplains can be heard uttering this ridiculous phrase related to wins, starting positions, awards, contracts, playing time, leadership roles, coaching jobs, and more ad nauseum. Sport is the ultimate meritocracy, we win because we earn it, not because we deserve it. At each higher level of competition, it becomes more so. I am stunned at the players who arrive on our university campus and in our sports teams who seem to think that showing up is good enough. They have grown up so entitled that they assume that having arrived here is equivalent to achievement. They think they deserve to win and to be awarded just for being present. We must not feed this monster.

“GOD GAVE US THIS WIN.” Please don’t say this unless you’re also willing to say, “God gave us this loss.” Why would God give you this win? Does He hate your opponent? Does God think your team is holier than the others? Does He like your uniform colors or logo? Let’s give this matter more prayerful consideration than comes with the flippant use of this cliché.

“WITH THE LORD ON OUR SIDE, HOW COULD WE LOSE?” This is similar to the previous thought, but just as foolish. I have heard this more times than I’d like to recall. Usually uttered by well-meaning Christian sports people, it is a clumsy attempt to give glory to God for a victory. It would be much better to simply express one’s joy and thankfulness for experiencing God’s presence during competition and to thank Him for the opportunity to compete with an honorable and excellent opponent. We are foolish when we ask the Lord Jesus to take sides in a sporting contest.

There are surely many other clichés which are unsuitable for our use and unworthy of the Lord Jesus’ representatives. Let’s contemplate the power of our words and work diligently to find language to serve the men and women of sport with our tongues. We can have a profound impact upon their experiences in sport when we wisely speak, “the very words of God,” as described in I Peter 4:1-11.