

From the Office of THE PRESIDENT



BUILDING A CULTURE OF EXCELLENCE AND VIRTUE

By Dr. Bill Thierfelder



It is inspiring to see how many student-athletes and coaches have embraced the philosophy and practice of “Sport and Virtue” here at the Abbey, and this issue of *Crossroads* reveals how it is being done both on and off the fields of play. Our cutting edge Motorsports Business Management Program is a great example of how sport, academia, and the spiritual life are all integrated at Belmont Abbey College. It also leads us to consider the value and importance of sport in the world today.

We tend to think that sport, unlike child's play, is more adult, work-like, and serious, when in fact just the opposite is true. We are attracted to sport because it is play! Every human being from the beginning of time has played, and that may explain why it pervades our society to such a high degree. We are so *wired* to play that we are even willing to pay to watch others do it!

Classical literature contains many references to sport and also describes

how important it was to the life and culture of people from all places and in all times. These references suggest that sport and play were essential to the education and formation of youth. The list of those who have written about the importance and place of sport throughout history may surprise you. They are among the best and brightest that have ever lived.

The great philosopher Socrates (470-399 B.C.) said, “It is certain that a good constitution will be of great advantage to us in all our undertakings. And, indeed, it is shameful for a man to grow old before he has tried his own strength, and seen to what degree of dexterity of perfection he can attain...because dexterity and strength come not of themselves, but by practice and exercise.”

Later Plato (428-348 B.C.), a student of Socrates, wrote, “For he who changes the sports is secretly changing the manners of the young, and making the old to be dishonored among them and the new to be honored.”

Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), a student of Plato, reinforced Socrates’ claim of the importance of sport, “As in the Olympic Games it is not the most beautiful and the strongest that are crowned but those who compete.”

The very fact that these luminaries of Western thought weighed in on sport reinforces the significance of play – of sport – as part of the human condition. Moreover, the multitude of saints and scholars who have also written about sport only deepens the intrigue about, and the importance of, sport in our time.

The joy of playing need not be sacrificed in the name of competition. On the contrary, one of the greatest joys of playing is winning and performing at your highest possible level. Sport asks for all of your mind, body, and spirit to win the game. It also demands that it be done with virtue. Accepting anything less transforms play into a selfish work. It is no longer done for the higher purpose, for the contemplation of the highest things for their own sake, but rather for the base and fleeting ends of money, power, and fame.

The reason for writing *Less Than a Minute to Go: The Secret to World-Class Performance in Sport, Business and Everyday Life* was to bring awareness to that proper role of sport in our culture and to help support the mission of Belmont Abbey College.

Thanks for your continuing support, and I look forward to seeing you sometime soon.

God bless,
Bill

P.S. Please help spread the word about the book to your friends and family and ask them to do the same! (All royalties, and profits from the St. Benedict Press publishing company are donated directly to the College.) ■