



Sports: an Indirect Stimulus for Ethics
Patrick Quinn
Spring, 2006
Xavier University



Precis

I am tracing the indirect role of γυμναστικά in education and moral development. I begin by exploring the evidence of athletics aiding the educational process of collegiate institutions, then travel back 100 years and examine Pierre de Coubertin's writings on athletics in educational systems. Coubertin writes invariably about the role of athletics in the educational process. Finally, I look towards Attic Greece and find parallels to modern collegiate athletics and Coubertin's writing in the Ancient Olympic Games as well as the gymnasiums of local city-states. Additionally, I am composing an epilogue in which I discuss my personal experiences on this matter.

It used to be an article of faith with our grandfathers that games train character. Many who have played games all their lives will be skeptical about this, but there can be no doubt that few human activities are more generous in revealing character.

-H.A. Harris, Greek Athletes and Athletics¹

Sport is great and philosophical, bringing us back to Stoic teachings where posterity has revealed many errors and exaggerations, but whose nobility and purity have never been challenged.

-Pierre de Coubertin, 1889

“Sports, an Indirect Stimulus for Athletics,” is an idea taken from the writings of Baron de Coubertin, founder of the Modern Olympic Games. In terms of the definition of *sports* in the context of this paper, it is meant to be similar to the ancient Greek word, γυμνασία, or “athletics.”² In ancient Greece, Plato saw music (μουσική), translated as art, letters, accomplishment, or anything presided over by the muses,³ and gymnastics (athletics), as chiefly responsible for the development of the soul and a system of ethics.⁴ (Here ethics is defined as “a set of principles of right conduct and a theory or system of moral values”).⁵ Yet in modern American society, athletics are rarely associated with the development of ethics. Indeed popular television shows like ESPN’s *Sportscenter*, calling themselves, “a news program [that] provides television's most thorough and entertaining presentation of the day's news in sports,”⁶ rarely talks of the development of ethics amidst the reportings of game scores, astronomical player salaries, the latest athlete caught using performance enhancers, or fascinating replays. Words like *sportsmanship*, defined as “conduct and attitude considered as befitting participants in sports, especially fair play, courtesy, striving spirit, and grace in losing,”⁷ seem as foreign to zealot *Sportscenter* news anchors and audience alike as a game of *Classical Password* being featured on ESPN. Although not often considered, the word *sportsmanship* bears an inherent relationship to ethics. That is the ethics defined in the Greek sense as *ethos*.

Essentially, this means a man's disposition, character, or manners.⁸ Sports has always shared a relationship with ethics. Some argue the former is an indirect stimulus for the latter.* This paper will elucidate the role of sports, albeit indirectly, in the ethical development of an athlete and present evidence to this fact.

As a starting point for this examination of sports and ethics, recall the ancient Olympic Games, a tremendously popular event in Attic Greece. Athletes came from the various regions of Hellas to represent their city-state in a competition that sought to prove the most excellent. Ancient Greek authors such as Herodotus and Pindar to name a few, recount the magnificent victories of athletes and many statues were built to this effect.⁹ Yet often is the character of these athletes overshadowed by their accomplishments. Their victories are sung about more than what kind of person they were. Did athletics play a role in their ethical development as this paper is claiming? The answer is yes. Along the path of conditioning their bodies towards the greatest physical excellence, lessons in morality and ethics played a very important role sculpting the moral virtue of such athletes. In fact, ancient athletes were intelligent citizens who trained themselves diligently until a level of perfection was reached.¹⁰ Furthermore, the model of the Greek ethical athlete surfaces in the modern sports arena as well. Relationships between athletics and ethics are hardly as extinct as they would appear to a modern sports enthusiast. Many college universities, including our own Xavier University, illustrate the importance of athletics in the holistic education of its students.

* This is explicitly written in the writings of Pierre de Coubertin, as will later be explored in the following pages of this paper.

Section II: Ethics is in the realm of the modern athlete

Just how do we see the connections between ethics and athletics in contemporary society? Well, it is very difficult to deny the widespread popularity of athletics in America and the world throughout. Professional athletic teams in various sports like football, baseball, basketball, and soccer are in almost every major city. Youth leagues in these sports and many more can be found in every town. On the college and university level, 1024 of such institutions in the United States are members of the National Collegiate Athletic Association, or NCAA.¹¹ This governing body of college athletics was formed in 1910 as a way to abolish the current lawless state of college athletics and establish rules and preside over athletic competitions.¹² Yet what is the purpose of college athletics and why does it need a governing body at all? Is it supposed to manage and develop athletes on their way to professional athletic careers? For the large majority of college athletes, the answer is no. The NCAA reports that 2.9 percent of high school athletes are able to participate in college athletics. The probability of a high school athlete reaching professional status is 0.03 percent or 3 in 10,000. When considering college athletes, only 1.3 percent of them reach professional level.¹³ So the purpose of the NCAA cannot be to prepare future professional athletes if only a little over 1 person in 100 ever reached professional athletic status. If Xavier's Williams College of Business only had 1 out of 100 of their students hired by companies upon graduation, there would certainly be an uproar. The Williams College of Business would have some explaining to do because that level of success is not acceptable in their professional world. Therefore, what

purpose does the NCAA serve for its athletes? According to their mission statement, the NCAA has the educational experience of the student-athlete at heart. It reads, “Our purpose is to govern competition in a fair, safe, equitable, and sportsmanlike manner, and to integrate intercollegiate athletics into higher education so that the educational experience of the student-athlete is paramount.”¹⁴ Furthermore Article 2.2 of the NCAA constitution states, “Institutions are to conduct their athletic programs in a manner designed to protect and enhance the physical and educational welfare of student-athletes.”¹⁵ So the NCAA sees athletics as an important component of a student’s education.

These sentiments of the NCAA are expressive of the general rationale for intercollegiate athletics. For in collegiate athletics lies, “the traditional and firmly established recognition of sports and athletics as an integral and constructive dimension of educational and social development especially at the college level.”¹⁶ The role of athletics is apparent in this statement. Athletics functions in the development of an athlete. Notice how development in this sense is not the physical sense that one might primarily associate with athletics but an educational and social development. Furthermore, Paul Weiss in “A Philosophic Inquiry” articulates very clearly the educational and social development previously mentioned. He states:

An intercollegiate athletic program contributes to the personal development of those who participate and witness, and the kind of development fostered by such activities overlaps with the kind of development that the College hopes to foster through its academic and other programs:

1. Learning the importance of preparation to achieve goals.
2. Learning to abide by the rules.
3. Learning how to delay the need for immediate gratification for the sake of long-range objectives.
4. Learning how to work in collaboration with others while also perfecting one's own individual skills.
5. Learning about one's own capacities and limits (physical and emotional, motivational, and intellectual) in practices and contests where feedback tends to be clear and prompt.¹⁷

Notice how learning encompasses so many aspects of athletics. It is no wonder 1024 colleges and universities are members of the NCAA. To offer an example of the existence of social, moral, and ethical development offered by collegiate athletics, consider our own Xavier University.

According to the University's Mission Statement, "Xavier's mission is to educate. Our essential activity is the interaction of students and faculty in an educational experience, characterized by critical thinking and articulate expression with specific attention given to ethical issues and values."¹⁸ It is clear Xavier focuses on the education of the student with attention towards moral and ethical issues. The themes apparent in the University's mission statement are also reemphasized in the Athletic Department's Mission Statement. It reads,

Consistent with the Jesuit philosophy of education and the mission of the University, the Xavier University intercollegiate athletics program

strives to enhance and integrate the intellectual, moral, spiritual, emotional, social and physical growth of young men and women. Each sport operates in an environment of integrity and ethical conduct, which promotes: academic success, fiscal responsibility, competitive excellence, sportsmanship, community service and equitable opportunities for all students and staff, including women and minorities.¹⁹

The Xavier Athletic Department's Mission Statement very clearly and emphatically states that the purpose of athletics is to serve as a means for the student-athlete to reach greater physical, intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth. Does this not bear witness to the development of a set of ethics in an athlete? Clearly, this mission statement shows Xavier University's commitment to instill character into the hearts of its athletes. It also resounds the NCAA's desire to integrate intercollegiate athletics into an athlete's education.²⁰

Section III: The Indirect Role of athletics to foster character as seen in Baron Pierre de Coubertin's vision of education

Neither the NCAA nor Xavier athletics is responsible for this correlation between athletics and a "paramount education."²¹ Years before the founding of the NCAA, the self-described educationalist who explored all areas of human activity,²² Frenchman Pierre de Coubertin expressed these same views regarding the impact of athletics on one's holistic development of character as will be shown. Although today he is popularly known as the father of the modern Olympic Games,²³ de Coubertin was primarily an education reformer. In fact, "a specialist work published in Germany in 1908 depicts de

Coubertin as a remarkable French education reformer, failing even to mention his work in restoring the Olympic Games.”²⁴ Born in 1863, de Coubertin spent his school days participating in “the balance that was so keenly sought.”²⁵ What balance is this? It is the balance between pursuits in sports and education (think back to μουσικη). De Coubertin earned a Bachelier ès Lettres and Bachelier ès Sciences from the Jesuit Collège Saintlgnace while participating in several sports such as fencing, horseback riding, boxing, and rowing.²⁶ In his school days, de Coubertin is said to have developed a love of Greek antiquity through classes in the Humanities and Rhetoric. It is clear this education in the Classical Humanities would later play an important role for de Coubertin’s correlations with sports and character development.

Also in his school days, de Coubertin would break away when he could from his academic demands to play sports. This is because the dynamics of sports cultured the ability in him to take the initiative in the particular situations in which he was involved. De Coubertin saw how decision-making goes hand in hand with a need for balanced self-knowledge.²⁷ Needless to say, de Coubertin’s participation in athletics influenced his character and supplemented his academic education. In his “thirst for knowledge,”²⁸ he read Locke’s *Thoughts on Education*. He also read Herbert Spencer’s *Treatise on Intellectual, Moral and Physical Education*. Moreover, “above all, de Coubertin remained deeply marked by the harmonious Greek vision of philosophy, literature, the sciences and the arts.”²⁹ Clearly de Coubertin’s education in the Jesuit system was influencing his thought and directing his formation of ethics. It is as though de Coubertin was experiencing the same elements of athletics and education that ancient Greek athletes

did centuries ago. This experience would later spark de Coubertin's ideas regarding the essentiality of athletics in educational institutions.

Additionally, while reading various other works on education de Coubertin could not help but parallel the English education system with that of the French.³⁰ During his trips to England, which he began at age twenty, de Coubertin witnessed the "Christian athlete movement" at Oxford and Cambridge Universities.³¹ This is basically the rise in popularity of athletics in England and de Coubertin saw it as something that France should experience as well. De Coubertin also encountered a clergyman and director of Rugby College from 1828-1852, by the name of Thomas Arnold,³² who,

Made sports a serious occupation and transformed the school into an institution. Taken together, initiative, the freedom to form a team that provides for the full development of the individual, and the taste for the fight gave each individual a style, the English style, that he would never lose.³³

Such was the educational philosophy of Thomas Arnold. De Coubertin was captivated by this system of education and upon returning to France, he wanted to introduce athletics like he saw in England into French Education. He wanted the establishment of free associations among high school and college students to develop the individual initiative de Coubertin spoke of as well as experience his idea of a balanced education.³⁴ He saw the way to developing initiative in students was allowing them "to engage freely in the athletic games one has chosen [in order to] regain self-possession, disengaging from stereotypes imposed from the outside, becoming responsible and truly preparing oneself to be a man."³⁵ Seen here is de Coubertin's view that despite socio-economical

or racial differences, everyone was equal on the playing field. Continuing with this philosophy, de Coubertin founded the Committee for the Propagation of Physical Exercise in Education on July 1, 1888.³⁶ Now de Coubertin's ideals were cemented into an organization dedicate to the task of promoting athletics in French schools.

In addition to de Coubertin's travels to England to study different educational systems, he also visited North America.³⁷ As he ventured into the southern states, de Coubertin witnessed the effects of discriminatory legislation like Jim Crow laws on society. In de Coubertin's eye, "culture should bring men together, without requiring them to renounce their very selves; one can acknowledge differences without ceasing to be human."³⁸ It is clear de Coubertin's views on humanity were certainly different from the nineteenth century South. He recognized the human race as a world community and sports as a vehicle towards reaching that community. Upon return from North America, de Coubertin published *Universités Transatlantiques*.³⁹ In this work, de Coubertin's ideals of education greatly matured. Reinforced with a worldview of the different educational systems across the continents, de Coubertin was committed to promoting lasting values in education and solving what he saw were the flaws in the French Educational system.⁴⁰ The flaws for de Coubertin were mainly the absence of athletics.

It is important to note here that de Coubertin did not see athletics as the sole means to an ethical end. In fact, as de Coubertin states, "Sports is merely an indirect stimulus for ethics. In order for it to become a direct stimulus, we must make the purpose of sport the creation of a sense of solidarity, which will cause sports to reach beyond itself. This is the *sine qua non* for cooperation between sports and ethics."⁴¹ What does de Coubertin mean by solidarity? During the early part of the twentieth century, when de

Coubertin was writing these passages, he had just witnessed the victory of the United States in World War I. He also saw, through his travels to the Americas, the presence of athletics in American colleges and universities. Pierre de Coubertin saw a relationship between these two factors. The solidarity formed on the athletic field was the same as the solidarity necessary between soldiers fighting a world war.⁴² In de Coubertin's own words,

University students, messengers of knowledge and imagination, will constitute the most active battalions in this great task; let us say if you wish that they will have to be its aviators. Now I have said, and I repeat, that sport by reason of its potent physical and moral effects will be an inestimable instrument in their hands for the establishment of social peace.⁴³

Here, de Coubertin attributes athletics with not only aiding the formulation of solidarity between participants but also as something essential to the national spirit of a country at war. Notice how de Coubertin recognized the “potent physical and moral effects” of sports. This further emphasizes the relationship between sports and ethics, and even its utility to national survival.*

However, de Coubertin never attributes sports solely as the founder of these potent moral effects. Recall it is only an indirect stimulus. In one of his letters on the modern Olympics, de Coubertin writes, “The alpha and omega of everything we have said hitherto is the distinction that must be repeatedly stressed between physical exercise

* It is interesting to note here how sports among the ancients sprang from its utility on the battlefield. Men practiced throwing the javelin, boxing, wrestling, and running because they were military tactics and necessary in war. De Coubertin is witnessing this same relationship centuries later.

as a mere agent of organic compensation and physical exercise as a creator of moral force and national force.”⁴⁴ Here, organic compensation is considered the physical activity merely to condition the body to reach a healthy equilibrium. It is simply exercising to keep the body fit and mechanically sound. The second form of exercise, that which promotes solidarity, according to de Coubertin, could “help forge character, reburnish a community, and even in democratic times, provide a link between different social classes.”⁴⁵ These words from de Coubertin echo very strongly the statements made in Plato’s *Republic*. Here, Socrates says, “a mere athlete becomes too much of a savage, and that the mere musician [think scholar] is melted and softened beyond what is good for him.”⁴⁶ Pierre de Coubertin and Socrates share the same ideas regarding athletics and education. Too much of either is adverse to the development of the harmonious man who possesses a blend of gymnastics and music.⁴⁷

Section IV: The application of de Coubertin’s revelations in athletics and education

De Coubertin’s beliefs are very real and true to him. However that was not enough. The founder of the Modern Olympics wanted these beliefs to echo through the halls and athletic playing fields of French schools as well. Yet resistance to the changes de Coubertin wanted to make in the French educational system arose.⁴⁸ No one seemed to pay attention to the valuable reforms de Coubertin had in mind. It is as though such detractors wanted to repel the presence of athletic institutions like those de Coubertin saw in the British educational systems in their own French Schools. They even “thought British-style athletics ill-suited to Gallic refinement.”⁴⁹ As a result, de Coubertin took another approach. Here is where the idea of a Modern Olympic Games begins to become a reality. As he writes, “To shore up the frail edifice that I had just built, it seemed to me

that restoration of the Olympic Games—this time as totally international games—was the only appropriate solution.”⁵⁰ Why lobby for the rebirth of the Olympic Games as a way to promote education around the world? The answer inherently lies in de Coubertin’s viewpoint on the essentiality of athletics to education. This is seen in de Coubertin’s letter entitled, “Olympic Education.”⁵¹ Pierre de Coubertin illustrates five major features of his Olympic education:

First, the concept of harmonious development of the whole human being; secondly, the idea of striving for human perfection through high performance; third, sporting activity voluntarily linked to ethical principles such as fair play and equality of opportunity, and the determination to fulfill those obligations; fourth, the concept of peace and goodwill between nations, reflected by respect and tolerance in relations between individuals; and finally, the promotion of moves towards emancipation in and through sport.⁵²

Clearly, the purpose of the Olympics is not for countries to make political statements, nor for athletes to win or lose. Instead, the Olympics are meant to promote ethical considerations of fair play and treatment towards others by bringing nations together on one, Olympic stage. In de Coubertin’s words, “Such as it was in ancient Greece; [. . .]; as such it has arisen again in the modern world, at first unconsciously among the Anglo-Saxons at the time of Thomas Arnold, and then in a world-wide and definite manner after the revival of the Olympic Games as proclaimed in Paris in 1894.”⁵³ So de Coubertin, in his modern version of the Olympics, wanted to capture what he felt the ancient Olympics symbolized as seen in the excerpt from “Olympic Education.”

But where did de Coubertin get his quest for solidarity and viewpoint of athletics as a component of the holistic educational process? Recall how de Coubertin was deeply influenced in his Jesuit schooling days by ancient Greek philosophy, literature, science, and art.⁵⁴ A good question to ask at this point is what did the ancient Olympics symbolize and how did they impact de Coubertin's thought? This question will be addressed. However, before the philosophical and religious elements of what the ancient Olympics exemplified can accurately be considered, it is necessary to gain an appropriate background of the ancient Greek Olympics.

Section V: History of the Ancient Olympic Games

It is important to discuss the ancient Olympic Games in this paper not for a history lesson but for seeing how sports aids the development of ethics in its participants. This particular pan-Hellenic athletic contest will be the main focus hereafter. This is not to say that other pan-Hellenic athletic contests were not held. Festivals like the Pythian games at Delphi, the Isthmian games dedicated to the god Poseidon, and the Nemean games, honoring Zeus,⁵⁵ drew the attention of accomplished athletes and throngs of spectators as well. The Olympic games are chosen because of their vast popularity and relatedness to the modern Olympics albeit in name or similar events.

Therefore, consider athletic competitions, whose foundations go all the way back to the time of the Bronze Age. "Physical contests among men are illustrated in artworks and writings from the earliest times: wall paintings in Crete depict bull leaping, coins from Larissa show bull wrestling, vessels from the Greek Bronze Age display belt wrestling and chariot racing."⁵⁶ In fact, wrestlers appear on wall paintings dating back to approximately 2000 B.C. as well as in 1600 B.C. when boxers were discovered on a

fresco in Akrotiri in Thera.⁵⁷ This evidence suggests the possibility of the Greek Olympics having its roots in the Bronze Age.⁵⁸ Furthermore, looking into Homer's *Iliad*, evidence of athletic competitions appears in Book XXIII. In this section of the *Iliad*, Achilles presides over funeral games commemorating the death of his cousin, Patroklos.⁵⁹ In these games, Achilles offered various gifts of honor to the victor⁶⁰ of "footraces, archery contests, chariot races, boxing and wrestling matches, that were held outside the walls of Troy."⁶¹ From this information we see the beginnings of athletic contests.

Moreover, centuries later in 776 B.C.,⁶² in the evening of the month of Appollonius, and in the full moon, "there was a great foot race in a meadow beside the river Alpheus at Olympia, and one Coroebus was the winner."⁶³ Thus the first Olympic festival was created not just to prove the fastest or most athletic, but out of a religious significance as well. They were held "in the vale of Olympia below the heights of Cyllene and Erymanthus, and goes back beyond the recorded triumph of Coroebus. It goes back to the twilight of a legend."⁶⁴

As written by Pindar and other Greek poets, some say that on top of the high peaks of Mount Olympus, Zeus battled Kronos for possession of the earth.⁶⁵ Moreover, the wreath of wild olive, the prize Coroebus was awarded, was a "garland woven from the twigs and leaves of the tree that Hercules [. . .] had sought in the lands of the Hyperboreans and planted in the sacred grove near the Temple of Zeus at Olympia."⁶⁶ Winning such a wreath signified that Zeus favored that particular athlete.⁶⁷

Yet another legend about the founding of the Olympic Games exists. This is the legend of King Oenomaus and Pelops. King Oenomaus had a beautiful daughter,

Hippodamia. When she was of marrying age, the King decreed that a suitor could only marry Hippodamia by “taking her in a chariot and escaping from the pursuit of her majestic father in a similar vehicle. The pursuit was carried on with homicidal intent and, upon overhauling the pursued, it was the custom of good King Oenomaus to transfix the unlucky suitor with his royal spear.”⁶⁸ This fatal contest occurred thirteen times before Pelops, “a youthful warrior of fine presence and great courage,”⁶⁹ used cunning measures to secure his future bride. Apparently, Pelops bribed the King’s charioteer to loosen one of the axels on the royal chariot. As could be imagined, during King Oenomaus’ pursuit of Pelops, his chariot lost its wheel and the King crashed, breaking his neck. Thus Pelops won Hippodamia. Pindar maintains that Poseidon gave Pelops a chariot led by winged horses to ensure his victory. Either way, Pelops had a beautiful, new bride and King Oenomaus’ rule was awarded to him. Therefore, in Olympia, on that very ground where Pelops won Hippodamia, the games and religious rites were created to celebrate his victory.⁷⁰ Thereafter, Pelops became the hero worshiped at Olympia.⁷¹

Whichever myth one chooses to believe, the Olympics began their inaugural festival in 776 B.C. and was held every fourth year.⁷² As mentioned previously, Coroebus was the first Olympic victor.⁷³ He won the footrace, called the *stadion*,⁷⁴ the only event held at the Olympics that year and for the next thirteen Olympiads.

Yet no records of how fast Coroebus ran exist or were even initially recorded. Although today we scrupulously examine times and records, ever striving to run against the clock as well as each other, the Greeks on the other hand, “were not interested in establishing records for individual performances [. . .] they took so little care to record times and distances or establish uniform standards for tracks, javelins or discuses.”⁷⁵

Despite the lack of a stop-watch ancient Greek athletes “were as keen as their modern counterparts on records.” Their records consisted of being the first to achieve some victory or combination of victories, just as today we remember the first man to beat six feet in the high jump or four minutes in the mile long after those feats have become commonplace.⁷⁶ The ancient athletes were not shy or modest about holding these records either. For example one successful runner from Miletus wrote in the first century A.D., “I won the *diaulos* at the 190th Olympic Games; in the Pythian, the men’s *stade*, *diaulos*, and armed race on the same day; at Nemea I was first of all men to win *stade* and the armed race from the trophy and to be proclaimed the best man of Greece.”⁷⁷

In the following Olympiads, more competitions were added to the festival like wrestling and the *pentathlon*. The *pentathlon* was a contest of five different athletic events: long jump, discus, javelin, a foot race, and wrestling . Moreover, the pentathlon was seen as the “supreme test of the all-rounder.”⁷⁸

Boxing was also added years later. This was a popular event, even among the greatest thinkers of Classical Greece. Diogenes of Laertius tells us how the famous philosopher and mathematician, Pythagoras of Samos won the boxing event in the 588 B.C. Olympics. Although Pythagoras was rumored to wear a golden thigh, I am not sure if wearing this would give him any advantage.

Horse racing was also added as an Olympic event in 680 B.C.⁷⁹ Interestingly enough, Philip II of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great, is recorded as winning the chariot race at Olympia in 356.⁸⁰ Although the Greeks regarded the Macedonians as foreigners, King Alexander I of Macedonia, ancestor to Philip II and Alexander the Great, was allowed to enter the Olympic Games after furnishing proof of Greek heritage

to judges.⁸¹ So by Philip II's time, the Macedonians were cleared to compete in the Olympic Games.

Then came the *pankration* into the Games in 648 B.C.⁸² According to John Herrmann Jr, "the *pankration* was the most dangerous of the heavy events: matches ended when one opponent submitted or was incapacitated. All holds were allowed, and only eye gouging and biting were forbidden."⁸³

Presiding over these various sporting events were the Olympic judges or *Hellanodikai*. These judges "had marks of distinction such as purple robes, elevated seats at the games, and, for ten months, separate living quarters, the *Hellanodikaion*, in the civic center at Elis."⁸⁴ The *Heallanodikai* supervised the training of athletes, presented the victors with their wreaths, and presided over the final feast at the Olympic Games. They also had no religious duties. They were not priests or participated in cult rituals.⁸⁵

Nevertheless, the ancient Olympic Games held considerable religious significance. The games represented a religious feast for all Greeks.⁸⁶ In fact, "The peoples of Greece flocked to Olympia to make their pilgrimage. Eventually, tens of thousands were making the quadrennial trip to the sanctuary [of Zeus at Olympia] and the Olympic Games became the most popular of all the pan-Hellenic assemblies."⁸⁷ The athletes themselves performed religious duties at the games.⁸⁸ In fact, the ancient Greeks worshipped beauty so much that religious observances often carried over into their athletic demonstrations.⁸⁹ Thus it is clear that athletics to the Greeks also held ceremonial and religious connections. Even in the beginnings of athletics and competition, athletes participated for a cause. Whether the funeral games for Patroklos,

or the celebration of the feats of Pelops at Olympia, Greek athletics were not meant to prove a winner and loser, but centered around the act of competing in honor of someone or something. To the Greeks, sport was “considered a religious and civic—in a word, moral—undertaking.”⁹⁰

Another example supporting the morality behind Greek participation in athletics is the prize given to Olympic victors. Upon winning an Olympic event, an athlete was crowned with a wreath of wild olive.⁹¹ That was it. Yet the wreath stood for honor and glory in the face of the gods. The Olympic victor was even crowned in the temple of Zeus at Olympia.⁹² Thus, what the wild-olive crown lacked in material value it more than compensated in honor. Such honor surrounding a victor even reached the ears of the Persians:

In 480 B.C., when the Persians were preparing for the battle of Thermopylae, they were told by a group of deserters that their adversaries were watching the Olympic games, at which athletes competed for an olive wreath. Tigranes, one of the Persian officers, wondered aloud in the presences of King Xerxes at men who compete with one another for no material reward, but only for honor.⁹³

It is important to note that Tigranes supposing the Greek Olympic athletes only competed for honor is a misunderstanding. The victors, when returning home, were rewarded finely for their triumph and the honor the athlete brought to his city-state. The victors were given large sums of money and lifetime privileges and honors from the city-state that they honored.⁹⁴ For example, Athenian Olympic victors were honored with free lifetime meals in the public dining hall.⁹⁵ In some cases, benefits from city-states such as

free meals for life became expected by returning victors. According to Plutarch, Solon had to limit the gifts bestowed on victors to 500 drachmas.⁹⁶ Not only were victors provided with lifetime benefits, some athletes' triumphs would be immortalized by the famous lyric poet, Pindar, in the form of an ode. Additionally, when Olympic champions were not rewarded with an appropriate endowment, they could be quite perturbed. Consider the story of Oebotas of Achaia, who won the stadion in the Sixth Olympic Games, for example:

Oebotas of Achaia was received home with what he deemed insufficient honors and who, in revenge, put a curse upon the town. For seventy-four Olympiads the town never welcomed home another Olympic victor. Messengers were sent to ask the Oracle at Delphi for advice. Word came back to the citizens to raise a belated statue to Oebotas. This was done and, at the next Olympic Games, Sostratas of Achaia won the foot race.⁹⁷

Oebotas may have been a little more than just perturbed to curse a city for seventy-four Olympiads. Although, in much the same way, Babe Ruth's malediction towards the Boston Red Sox for being traded to the Yankees in 1918 did withhold the Red Sox from a World Series Championship for eighty-six years. Perhaps one reason athletes were so emotional about the benefits of a champion was because of the time and effort they invested in training. In fact, there is little doubt athletes who were seeking such honors spent a considerable amount of time training to compete in the Olympics. When athletes arrived at Olympia for the games, they had to swear they had been training in their respective events for a time of at least ten months. Additionally, they went through a thirty-day period of training at Olympia with instructors and officials watching.⁹⁸

Athletes during this thirty-day period would train in Olympia's own palaestra and gymnasium. The palaestra's main purpose was to train men in wrestling, boxing and the pankration. The gymnasium served as a training ground for the lighter athletics. It was built like an elongated rectangle to hold running tracks and spaces for throwing the javelin and discus.⁹⁹

Section VI: The Training of Athletes: Physically and Ethically

When considering the oath Olympic athletes took affirming their ten-month training period and the thirty-days they trained in the Olympic palaestra, it is right to assume that the athletes trained in facilities like the palaestra and gymnasium in their native city states. In fact, "One of the most characteristic landmarks of the Greek city was the gymnasium,"¹⁰⁰ and it was also a state supported institution.¹⁰¹ It is important to note at this point that when considering the differences in the palaestra and the gymnasium in Greek city-states and in Athens in particular, the palaestra was the training center for younger boys and the gymnasium for men over eighteen.¹⁰² However, both establishments share the same purpose, "a place where youths and men, unhampered by clothing, could carry out sports and exercises."¹⁰³ For the rest of this paper, attention will focus on the gymnasium for the mere reasons of simplicity, focus, and avoiding the use of *palaestra* and *gymnasium* interchangeably.

Thus the gymnasium served as a place for athletes to train and exercise. Certainly there was always the hope of qualifying for the Olympic festival. Yet, this was not the only thought that kept men coming to the gymnasium. Think back to the purpose of collegiate athletics. As will be shown, evidence suggests that the ancient gymnasium was also a "headquarters of higher and adult education."¹⁰⁴ This use of the gymnasium draws

significant parallels to the education system championed by de Coubertin many centuries later because “the popular and almost universal Hellenic practice of gymnastic became a distinctive department of Greek education.”¹⁰⁵ This was especially true in Athens where education was fueled by a moral purpose.¹⁰⁶ Additionally, the Athenians believed gymnastic activities were necessary for a healthy development of their bodies.¹⁰⁷ The Athenian emphasis on the gymnasium as an important cultural center and its utility to promoting Athenian ideals is clear. This is because many philosophers, writers, and musicians would hold lectures or discussions among the crowds of people gathered at the public gymnasium. When considering these ideals, it is no surprise that sophistical and philosophical teaching began in the gymnasium¹⁰⁸ because many of the creative talents in Hellas, like Plato or Socrates, first shared their ideas at this public place.¹⁰⁹ This seems appropriate because the social quality of the gymnasium provided the ability to engage in discussion on sophistry. Additionally, “while the Sophists were itinerant by profession, Socrates was a permanent fixture in Athens and was one of the best known habitués of the city’s gymnasia. Wherever Socrates appeared, there were sure to be enlivening talk and informal education.”¹¹⁰ Moreover, his student, Plato, was quite the wrestler in his younger days. He even competed in the Isthmian games in this event.¹¹¹

Because Plato was an avid wrestler himself and as a result of “the casual and desultory frequenting of the gymnasia by such educators as the Sophists and Socrates, [. . .] Plato acquired the gymnasium called the Academy as an established headquarters for his philosophical school.”¹¹² It is very interesting that what has been regarded as the first university actually was a gymnasium. Now, Plato’s establishment of the Academy was not the modern equivalent of turning an old YMCA into a school. Plato was a strong

supporter of athletics and the evidence is right in his *Republic*. He felt athletics, along with music, was a key component of a harmonized soul.¹¹³ What is a harmonized soul? Socrates asserts in the *Republic* that, “the soul of a man thus harmonized is moderate and courageous.”¹¹⁴ As shown here, moderation and courage are characteristics of what constitutes the good life, one that is attained through music and athletics. This view is further emphasized when Socrates states, “the man who makes the finest mixture of gymnastic with music and brings them to his soul in the most proper measure is the one of whom we would most correctly say that he is the most perfectly musical and well harmonized.”¹¹⁵ It is clear from these statements made in the *Republic* how much the Sophists value a life mixed properly with education (music) and athletics (gymnastics). Moreover, striking similarities exist between the sophist view on athletics and education and those of de Coubertin years later. Recall how he cherished, “above all, [. . .] the harmonious Greek vision of philosophy, literature, the sciences and the arts?”¹¹⁶ There is little doubt as to where de Coubertin’s inspiration for his visions of athletics and education originate. It is with the Sophists. Furthermore, it is now clear that the Xavier Athletic Department’s Mission Statement echoes these same views as well.

Yet Socrates and Plato were not alone in their teachings on the harmonious life. Other philosophers would hold lectures and discussions in the various gymnasia in Athens. A Greek in the fourth century could listen to Aristotle in the Lyceum which was located “northeast of the walls on the site of what are the present botanical gardens of Athens.”¹¹⁷ In addition, both Antisthenes and Dionegeas, the Cynic philosophers could be found in the Cynosarges,¹¹⁸ which was the gymnasium “to the southeast, where metics and non-citizens often congregated.”¹¹⁹ Also by this point, Hellenistic architects

incorporated auditoriums into their building plans for a gymnasium. Excavations in Ephesus and Pergamum show these auditoriums were filled with tiers of permanent seats, as in present-day classrooms. Additionally, the popularity of the gymnasium and its various uses were not limited to Athens, but reached to Egypt and Asia Minor as well.¹²⁰

Therefore, the gymnasium was for the Greeks a place to train and exercise the body and mind. Learning intellectual and moral values was just as common a practice to the gymnasium as learning a new wrestling move. However, one clarification is necessary. Despite the presence of moral and philosophical lectures in the gymnasium, one should not assume that every athlete turned out to be a moralist or a philosopher of virtue like Pythagoras or Plato. Even despite the story of Cleitomachus of Thebes, winner of three Olympic victories in wrestling and the pankration, who in much the same fashion as I myself would act, rose and left his company when any improper story was told in his presence.¹²¹ On the contrary, the Athenian Dioxippus, winner of the pankration in 336 B.C., “Upon his return to his native city was given the civic reception always accorded to Olympic victors, and while he was riding in a chariot in the procession through the streets of Athens he caused an unfavorable comment by ostentatiously ogling a pretty girl among the crowd.”¹²² The comment came from Diogenes the Cynic who said, “Look at your great wrestler now; that young minx has got him by the short hairs already.”¹²³ O, Diogenes you wit. So it is obvious that individual athletes would respond differently to the opportunities for training and learning provided at the gymnasium.

Conclusion: Athletics and education in the development of ethics now as it always has been since the time of the Ancient Greeks

The establishment and uses of the ancient gymnasium show the relatedness between athletics and education. Over two thousand years later de Coubertin drew the same connections between athletics and education in his quest for reforming the French school system. To de Coubertin, “sport is defined by its outcome. It is free effort, it is the fight, it is hardening the muscular culture of the body and the character.”¹²⁴ As discussed previously, the NCAA and Xavier University capture this philosophy as well. Recall the goal of our University’s athletic department is to promote the “intellectual, moral, spiritual, emotional, social and physical growth of young men and women through sports.”¹²⁵ Thus the role athletic activity plays in developing one’s moral character can be traced through the centuries. This role also is trans-cultural and not a unique occurrence. Although it is true athletics is not the sole vehicle towards ethical awareness, it is highly effective in conjunction with activities that improve the mind. For Plato, it was even a component of the harmonious soul. Do not forget however, “Sports is merely an indirect stimulus for ethics.”¹²⁶ Participation in sports should not be seen as a passive trip towards the moral, spiritual, emotional, etc, growth mentioned in the Xavier University Department of Athletics Mission Statement. This is because, “The moral fight is independent of the physical fight, [and although] some elite souls have not needed the second to triumph the first, but that is the exception to the rule.”¹²⁷ Therefore, despite such exceptions to the rule, and despite media announcers who are all too obliged to report the latest athlete caught cheating, the relationship of ethics and athletics is quite evident. It was recognized over 2500 years ago with the sophists, and ethical guidelines

are still the highly valued tenets of athletic organizations like the NCAA and institutions such as our own Xavier University.

Works Cited

Dictionary.com. 2006. Lexico Publishing Group, LLC. 05 Feb. 2006.

<www.dictionary.com>.

Drees, Ludwig. 1968. *Olympia*. USA: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers.

ESPN.com. 2006. ESPN Internet Ventures. 15 Feb 2006. <www.ESPN.com>.

Forbes, Clarence. 1945. "Expanded Uses of the Greek Gymnasium." *CP* 40:32-42.

Golden, Mark. 1998. *Sport and Society in Ancient Greece*. UK: Cambridge University Press.

Harris, H.A. 1964. *Greek Athletes and Athletics*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.

Hermann, John J. and Christine Kondoleon. 2004. *Games for the Gods*. Boston: MFA Publications.

Hibler, Richard W. 1988. *Life and Learning in Ancient Athens*. Maryland: University Press of America, Inc.

Homer, (transl. Richmond Lattimore). 1951. *Iliad*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hugill, W.M. 1949. "Olympics Old and New." *Phoenix* 3:31-9

Kieran, John and Arthur Daley. 1969. *The Story of the Olympic Games*. USA: J.B. Lippincott Company.

Laurie, S.S. 1894. "The History of Early Education. Hellenic Education. Chapter IV. Athenian and Ionic-Attic Education (Continued)." *The School Review* 2:487-505.

Liddell and Scott. 1889. Greek-English Lexicon. Spain: Oxford University Press.

Milhalich, Joseph C. 1982. *Sports and Athletics, Philosophy in Action*. New Jersey:

- Littlefield, Adams & Company.
- Müller, Norbert, ed. 2000. *Pierre de Coubertin: Olympism*. Switzerland: International Olympic Committee.
- Pindar, (transl. Roy Arthur Swanson). 1974. *Pindar's Odes*. USA: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc.
- Plato, (transl. Allan Bloom). 1991. *The Republic*. New York: Basic Books.
- Robinson, Rachel Sargent. 1955. *Sources for the History of Greek Athletics in English Translation*. Cincinnati: Author.
- Weiss, Paul. 1969. *Sport: A Philosophic Inquiry*. Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Will, George F. 1990. *The Craft of Baseball*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers.
- Xavier University Mission Statement. 2005. "University Mission Statement." Xavier University. 12 January, 2006. <www.Xavier.edu/mission>.
- Xavier University Athletic Mission Statement. 2005. Xavier University. 12 January, 2006. <goxavier.collegesports.com/ot/mission-statement.html>.
- www.NCAA.org. 2005. The National Collegiate Athletic Association Website. 12 January, 2006. <www.ncaa.org>.
- Young, David C. 1984. *The Olympic Myth of Greek Amateur Athletics*. Chicago: Ares Publishers.

¹ Harris, 110.

² Liddle and Scott.

³ Liddle and Scott, 520.

⁴ Plato, 410-2.

⁵ www.Dictionary.com.

⁶ www.ESPN.com.

⁷ www.Dictionary.com.

-
- ⁸ Liddle and Scott.
⁹ Robinson, 84.
¹⁰ Robinson, 83.
¹¹ www.NCAA.org.
¹² www.NCAA.org.
¹³ www.NCAA.org.
¹⁴ www.NCAA.org.
¹⁵ www.NCAA.org.
¹⁶ Milhalich, 94.
¹⁷ Weiss, 153.
¹⁸ Xavier University Mission Statement.
¹⁹ Xavier University Athletic Mission Statement.
²⁰ www.NCAA.org.
²¹ www.NCAA.org.
²² Müller, 17.
²³ Müller, 17.
²⁴ Müller, 33.
²⁵ Müller, 24.
²⁶ Müller, 24.
²⁷ Müller, 26.
²⁸ Müller, 26.
²⁹ Müller, 28.
³⁰ Müller, 28.
³¹ Müller, 28.
³² Müller, 28.
³³ Müller, 28.
³⁴ Müller, 28.
³⁵ Müller, 29.
³⁶ Müller, 29.
³⁷ Müller, 30.
³⁸ Müller, 30.
³⁹ Müller, 30.
⁴⁰ Müller, 30.
⁴¹ Müller, 169.
⁴² Müller, 171.
⁴³ Müller, 173.
⁴⁴ Müller, 221.
⁴⁵ Müller, 221.
⁴⁶ Plato, 410d.
⁴⁷ Plato, 411a.
⁴⁸ Müller, 31.
⁴⁹ Young, 59.
⁵⁰ Müller, 31.
⁵¹ Müller, 528.
⁵² Müller, 528-9.

-
- ⁵³ Müller, 221.
⁵⁴ Müller, 28.
⁵⁵ Harris, 36.
⁵⁶ Herrmann, 43.
⁵⁷ Golden, 183.
⁵⁸ Hermann, 43.
⁵⁹ Homer, XXIII.257-897.
⁶⁰ Homer, XXIII.257-897.
⁶¹ Hermann, 43.
⁶² Herrmann, 20.
⁶³ Kieran, 11.
⁶⁴ Kieran, 11.
⁶⁵ Kieran, 11.
⁶⁶ Kieran, 11.
⁶⁷ Herrmann, 22.
⁶⁸ Kieran, 12.
⁶⁹ Kieran, 12.
⁷⁰ Kieran, 12.
⁷¹ Herrmann, 48.
⁷² Kieran, 12-13.
⁷³ Kieran, 11.
⁷⁴ Golden, 41.
⁷⁵ Golden, 177.
⁷⁶ Harris, 126.
⁷⁷ Harris, 126.
⁷⁸ Harris, 77.
⁷⁹ Golden, 41.
⁸⁰ Herrmann, 114.
⁸¹ Drees, 41.
⁸² Golden, 41.
⁸³ Herrmann, 99.
⁸⁴ Golden, 15.
⁸⁵ Golden, 15.
⁸⁶ Kieran, 14.
⁸⁷ Drees, 7.
⁸⁸ Keieran, 14.
⁸⁹ Kieran, 13.
⁹⁰ Will, 2 .
⁹¹ Drees, 7.
⁹² Drees, 7.
⁹³ Drees, 7.
⁹⁴ Pindar, xxxii.
⁹⁵ Herrmann, 145.
⁹⁶ Harris, 37.
⁹⁷ Kieran, 13.

-
- ⁹⁸ Kieran, 15.
⁹⁹ Drees, 45.
¹⁰⁰ Forbes, 32.
¹⁰¹ Laurie, 493.
¹⁰² Laurie, 491.
¹⁰³ Forbes, 33.
¹⁰⁴ Forbes, 33.
¹⁰⁵ Hugill, 34.
¹⁰⁶ Laurie, 493.
¹⁰⁷ Laurie, 491.
¹⁰⁸ Laurie, 497.
¹⁰⁹ Hibler, 25.
¹¹⁰ Forbes, 33.
¹¹¹ Harris, 38.
¹¹² Forbes, 34.
¹¹³ Plato, 411.
¹¹⁴ Plato, 411.
¹¹⁵ Plato, 412.
¹¹⁶ Müller, 28.
¹¹⁷ Hibler, 24.
¹¹⁸ Hibler, 25.
¹¹⁹ Hibler, 24.
¹²⁰ Forbes, 34.
¹²¹ Harris, 122.
¹²² Harris, 122.
¹²³ Harris, 122.
¹²⁴ Müller, 129.
¹²⁵ Xavier University Athletic Mission Statement.
¹²⁶ Müller, 169.
¹²⁷ Müller, 129.