

## I Did It For My Country!

Tired of the Olympics yet? I am not. I love the Olympics, and I am not afraid to admit it.

In America, we naturally see the achievements of American athletes. I wonder what people in other countries view, however? I have been impressed that the U.S. athletes who win carry around American flags on their backs, cheer for our great country, and, when interviewed frequently, say "I am so proud to be an American" or "I did it for my country." National pride has come through regardless of the American athlete's color, religion, or ethnicity. It is a wonderful thing to see.

Athletes from other countries, usually talk of their personal achievement or the team effort. There seems to be less emphasis on identification with a national ethic, than among United States athletes.

Both of the Presidential candidates have been trying to snatch a few votes based upon the Olympics. Mitt Romney has been talking about his own Olympic experience, and Barack Obama has done his best to equate his Presidential aspirations with the winners of gold. Romney even has a commercial running with gold medal winners endorsing him!

How odd it seems, and painfully inconsistent, that our athletes stress teamwork and national unity while our political parties seem to be tearing us apart. I cannot help but wonder whether we are sending mixed messages to our young people. On the one hand, we preach sportsmanship to our children, and we demand that they treat one another with kindness and respect. When a team from China deliberately threw a match, we were all delighted to see them disqualified. Respectful dissent and honorable support of the team is very much the Olympic goal for most athletes.

Somehow that changes when Olympians graduate from the incubator of athletic competition to the real world. We applaud the remarkable athleticism and decency shown by athletes while chomping at the red meat tossed to us by our political candidates. Does anyone else find this ironic?

While driving home in the car the other day, I was listening to Rush Limbaugh. Rush was ranting and raving about those who hearken back to the days of consensus between the political parties. He made it very clear that people of his disposition should not compromise regardless of the consequences. Mr. Limbaugh's point of view is so alien to how I was raised, that I could barely understand his words. It is true that there are certain demons never to be reconciled with. Churchill and Roosevelt would not consider a compromise with Adolf Hitler. They were right, that the monster of World War II needed to be declawed and beheaded.

Unfortunately, American politics today paints its opponents as so thoroughly evil that compromise can never be entertained. This sort of thinking is dangerous because it runs counter to the American culture that we so esteem on our fields of sports competition. An organist at a minor league baseball game was recently thrown out for being disrespectful to an umpire. That may seem a bit extreme, but the idea was to remember that the sport is about playing nicely.

I used to work with a number of kids, encouraging them to learn the game of golf. We had a hard and fast rule that throwing clubs, cursing, and being mean to their opponents was **always** off-limits. Under no circumstances could any child misbehave in a way that showed unsportsmanlike characteristics.

Whether one agrees with the NCAA penalties levied against Penn State, the bottom line is that the development of the sports ethic is more important than university prestige or money making. That is a hard lesson to learn, but thankfully organizations like the NCAA "get it."

It is time for Americans to take a long and hard look at the political environment that we have created. Is it really bad and evil for political parties to work together for the benefit of the people? Are our political opponents so terrible that under no circumstances will we look fairly at their proposals in order to see if we can do what is right for the community and right for our citizens? Each person will have to answer these questions for himself, but it is my view that the unity we have shown in the Olympics must be promoted in every walk of American life.

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