**Sports and Sportsmanship**

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“Sports inculcate something in you that no institution, family or friendship can. A quality that eventually emanate(s) from you, something called Sportsmanship”?Sandeep Sahajpal

If Earth has to be divided on the basis of competition, it would probably be the political world, the knowledgeable world and the world of sports. The former, with all its nation-states, nationalities, complications, intrigues, wars, treaties, hegemony, economic competitions, various isms and what not while the latter two, transcending man-made boundaries play the exact opposing roles. The last one, although severely competitive, provides entertainment and lots of joyous moments along with teary eyes not to talk of bringing peoples of the world together in a single arena. Sports offer a healthy competitive platform for persons of all nationalities.

Other than being physically intense, sports also help to improve mental faculties. The number one advantage is that of stress relief. People today are inflicted with all types of physical and mental diseases because of the present global disorders. These are political complications, rapidly growing disparity between the haves and have-nots, acute competition between nations to monopolize the world economic front, the perilous extent of pollution and environmental degradation, rapid speed of imbalance in the eco-system causing drastic climatic changes and unexpected occurrences of natural disasters; and last but certainly not the least, increased disruption in human relations. Amid these disturbing conditions, sports appear as an important way out to divert attention and engage in salubrious activities.

That exercise releases endorphins, a vital chemical in the brain that reduces stress levels as well as stress hormones, cortisol and adrenaline, elating the spirit, is common knowledge. All one needs to do is to play games or work out for about 30 minutes to cast the magic. For a few moments, the mind is set free of all tensions, worries and anxieties helping one to calm down and sleep better.

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Of all the benefits of sports, the best one perhaps is its positive impact on a group participating in team-related games. Research proves that although the physical health of most athletes, whether practising individually or collectively is more or less the same, the mental health of group participants is better. This is probably due to combined human activity invoking fun and frolic along with the excitement of competition. This healthy interaction becomes more profound when people of different countries come together at major sports events to celebrate a few moments of a united human race that is already disintegrated at the hands of politically created boundaries resulting in unprecedented prejudice and enmity.

Wars have been raging for centuries between nations for very frivolous reasons and in the process wiping off hundreds of thousands of lives and destroying meticulously built landmarks in addition to spreading pollution. These berserk acts of savagery and aggression are consequences of extremities based on hatred, biases and greed but understandably sports should be above all these negativities yet these crooked politicians of the world have not spared this field either. One of the first gruesome episodes witnessed at an international stage occurred during the 1972 Summer Olympics held in Munich, West Germany when seventeen people including victims and perpetrators lost their lives just because a message needed to be transmitted across. Using the arena of sports for political motives is a sign of cowardice.

Recently, the T-20 World Cricket championship 2021 was held in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to which cricket fans in thousands flocked the stadiums to cheer their favourite teams. In the words of John McGraw: “Sportsmanship and easygoing methods are all right, but in the prospect of a hot fight that brings out the crowds.” Undoubtedly, the UAE welcomed enthusiasts from all over the world, who adorned almost all the seats in the stadiums of Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Sharjah and who whole-heartedly expressed their emotions on every stroke played by the cricketers.

We know there are rival teams that are always keen to excel over each other and rightfully so. Their focus is the cup that would earn them world championship, a much-coveted title. Each participating country prepares its team with full fervour in the hope that it would defeat its opponent in a convincing manner. If it wins, there are accolades but if it is unsuccessful (one of them has to) then all hell breaks loose. Severe criticism to the extent of being declared traitors become the destiny of the defeated team. This was the scene when arch-rivals, India and Pakistan, were poised against one another on 24 October 2021 in which the former lost the match. Instead of showing sportsmanship, the flared emotions of the people of our neighbouring country left everyone in shock. The only non-Hindu player, Muhammad Shami, became the target for the irrational public’s uproar that manifested itself in damaging properties belonging to the Muslim population. Even the Hindu captain was not spared from abuse and tongue lashing with verbal threats to his infant daughter.

Sports, the most innocent of all battles, should be absolutely free from politics. When it is bled with the viciousness of acrid words and actions, its image gets tarnished. The idea of healthy association becomes nullified and what is left is the brutality of international politics that contains nothing but devastation for humankind and shame for humanity. The world of sports must be kept at bay from its cruel clutches while the people who get emotionally charged at their team losing a game must realize that the arena is for entertainment and not the stage of a war. That winning is wonderful but losing is nothing more than a learning experience, for overcoming one’s weaknesses and preparing afresh for new challenges ahead. In the end, it is all about love and peace.

Bruce Grobbelaar puts this idea most appropriately in the following words: “When you go out on to that field it’s going to be war. Sportsmanship is playing to the best of your abilities and then, afterwards, shaking your opponent’s hand.”

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