

CLASSICS

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Sine doctrina vita est quasi mortis imago

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Competing in the Real World

by Tim Moon

The recent Olympic Games provided some inspiring and memorable moments for sports fans around the world. On the whole, they exemplified that which is best about athletics and competition. Unfortunately, there were a few memories from the games that would best be forgotten. The performance of the United States men's basketball team provided one such memory.

In 1992, America assembled arguably the greatest basketball team that had ever played together. Magic Johnson, Michael Jordan, and Larry Bird were just a few of the members of this star-studded cast. Together, they carved up the best the world had to offer and rolled undefeated to a gold medal. They out-rebounded, out-shot, out-hustled and out-played everyone and averaged a 30 point margin of victory per game in the process.

The 2004 performance by the Americans provided starkly different results. They were out-hustled, out-shot, and out-played in almost every aspect of the game. Undoubtedly, some of this can be attributed to the improvement the rest of the world has undergone over the last 20 years. Unfortunately, that is not enough to account for the eclipsing of the American advantage during that period. The real reason is far more sinister and perhaps surprising to those who do not seriously follow the game. It is the result of the changes that the NBA made some 30 years ago to make the game more attractive to the masses. These changes focused on transforming the game into an individual game that focuses on stars and glitter at the expense of character and team work. Zone defenses and double teams were removed forcing a one on one game between stars. The standards for calling a traveling penalty were also 'dumbed down' so as to allow the stars to take more than the legal number of steps on their way to the basket for an impressive yet undeserved slam dunk. These rule changes, over time, have resulted in skill erosion that goes unnoticed until NBA players are forced to compete by the rules. Nothing provides more evidence for this fact than the dismal shooting performance this 2004 American team displayed. The 2004 team seemed incapable of making open jump shots in big games. The United States shooting percentage in 1992 was 200 points higher than their opponents; in 2004 it was 23 points lower.

In short, basketball in America has been "dumbed down" through emphasizing its shallower aspects in an effort to better entertain a less-than-astute crowd. The NBA has fostered flash over substance to improve ratings. In so doing, they have allowed the game to be formed around the tastes of those who care the least about its quality. The irony of all this is that the NBA, as we know it today, which is supposed to represent the best

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Inside this issue:

| | |
|------------------|----|
| Book Review..... | 4 |
| Quid Novi..... | 5 |
| Classifieds..... | 8 |
| New members..... | 12 |

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Continued on page 2

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Competing in the Real World

continued from page 1

basketball in the world, is actually deteriorating the quality of basketball in America. If they closed the league tomorrow, the quality of basketball skill in the United States would actually improve. This is a tragic testimony of the detrimental impact of the love of money.

Unfortunately, American education has followed a similar pattern over the last century. Under pressure from modernist and pragmatic elements which have valued appearance and practicality over substance, the quality of education in America has suffered similar erosion. Academics, characterized by rigorous training in reading, writing, mathematics, grammar, thinking and speaking, have gradually been displaced with promising, progressive reforms designed to make education more practical and create the appearance that students were doing better than they actually were by dismissing the need for accountability to true standards. Vocational training, designed to prepare people to do a job, has been emphasized over teaching students to think, and the academic bar has been gradually lowered to create

the appearance that students are successfully being educated. These changes have acted more as educational deforms than reforms. They have intellectually stunted the students they were designed to help.

If people cannot think carefully and clearly, they have very little chance of performing competently on the job. And people who can think and communicate effectively can easily learn how to perform vocationally. Conversely, if they are not skilled in these areas, it does not matter what kind of grades they get. It is not an accident that C students in the 1950's were better educated than A stu-

dents are today. This is seen clearly in the continual "dumbing down" of the SAT test in an effort to replicate the same results that students in the 1950's experienced. When standards are high, the greatest beneficiaries are the C students who are assured a quality education. When standards are low they are most detrimental to the C students because they are rendered incapable of thinking critically or communicating effectively and have very little chance of succeeding in college or in life.

This century of educational deforms goes unnoticed until compared with the rest of the world. Then, as with basketball, the picture becomes vividly clear. In the third international test series on Math and Science literacy, the United States finished behind 18 other countries. Only South Africa and Cyprus finished lower. Our finish would have been much worse had Asian countries (which have regularly outscored the highest participants) chosen to take part in the competition. In phys-

ics, American students scored at the bottom of the heap.

The same pattern of erosion can be documented in historical knowledge and communication skills. Ironically,

when it comes to education, America outspends all the countries that finished ahead of them on the above exam. We spend more than all of them and perform worse. Even the NBA would shudder at those results. At least they came in third.

In 1950 America had the best primary and secondary schools in the world. Today, it is difficult to call them schools with a straight face. Although academic success is one of the chief indicators of a person's success later in life, millions are graduating yearly with deformed or underdeveloped skills in reading, writing, grammar, mathematics, thinking,

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Continued on page 3

CLASSIS

Competing in the Real World

continued from page 2

and speaking. If success in school has so great an impact on an individual, how much impact will the failure of our students academically have on the success of our nation? If we consistently relegate ourselves to last place in the industrial world, when it comes to education, how will we compete in an ever more competitive world economy? We cannot continue to sus-

tain this decline in American education without experiencing a competitive disadvantage. America's educational decline could very well be a predecessor to a significant economic decline. Should this occur, basketball will be the least of our concerns.

Fortunately, Annapolis Christian Academy, along with similar classical Christian schools throughout the country, are standing in the gap and producing competent and capable students who can compete on an international level. These schools share distinctively important characteristics. They are academically rigorous, they emphasize critical thinking and communication skills, and they teach everything under the umbrella of a Christian worldview. Last year, an Annapolis father told me the following story: His son was in Europe as a foreign exchange student. The previous year he had been at Annapolis and taken Mrs. Morvant's chemistry class. He complained a lot about the difficulty of her class at the time; however, in Europe the teacher found his knowledge of chemistry so impressive that he used him as a student assistant. In addition, he was able to challenge many students regarding their views on evolution. Most of the students there had never heard of alternatives to this theory. I doubt that this student would have had the same impact had he possessed a sub-par education in chemistry. He

no longer complains about the difficult nature of Mrs. Morvant's chemistry class, and I am convinced that there would be fewer complaints about the difficulty of our classes if

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the Europeans and Asians who place very high priorities on academics and possess high educational standards as well. If Americans took the time to consider this reality, there would be a lot more students at classical Christian schools and fewer complaints about homework. By emphasizing proper academic rigor, critical thinking and communication skills, in conjunction with a strong Christian worldview in every subject, classical Christian schools are preparing students to compete as Christians in the real world, not the artificial world of intellectual ease that progressive delusion has fostered.

If we would just drop our standards though, and make school more entertaining, we could attract a lot more students. We just need to conform to the standards that have rendered education in America what it is today. No one would ever get bad grades. No one would ever have to stay up late and do homework. And no one would ever be corrected for their behavior. Life would be easy and everyone would love us. We would have plenty of students and an abundance of extra curricular activities. Maybe we could even get help from the government so we would not have to charge tuition. We just need to compromise our standards and we can improve the size of our audience. After all, it has worked for the NBA, hasn't it?

everyone would look carefully at whom we are really competing against. We are not competing against the local school that does not place any value on academics. We are competing against



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He and Anita, his wife of 16 years, have four beautiful children. Three of the children (ages 14, 13, and 9) attend Annapolis, while their 2 years old gets to stay home with mom.

Tim is a life-long learner who loves to read especially about such subjects related to philosophy, history, apologetics, communication, and education. He is also a basketball enthusiast. Prior to taking the position at Annapolis, Tim served as Headmaster of a classical Christian school in Portland, Oregon.

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For more information about Annapolis Christian Academy you can visit their web site at www.aca-cc.org.