VIEWPOINTS

The place of interscholastic sports in a Christian school has, as the writer of the second viewpoint in this rubric suggests, been a subject of sometimes warm discussion among us. Some argue that interscholastic sports have no place at all, because the proficiency required in order to remain competitive necessitates an expenditure of time which for the child of God must be seen to be unacceptable. Others, while leaving room for athletic contests with other schools, have serious questions about which schools to play and what leagues to join. And, needless to say, decisions reached in these matters by majority vote do not put all such questions to rest. Uneasiness persists. It seems to us therefore that some further exploration of the issues involved is appropriate in our "Viewpoints." We asked Miss Agatha Lubbers, who throughout her career has been rather actively involved in coaching athletic teams, particularly at the high school level, to give a well-reasoned defense of interscholastic sports. And we asked Mr. Gary VanDer Schaaf, who in his own quiet way has in the past voiced reservations about them, to articulate for our readers his objections.

Our magazine, by the way, is open to response from our readers. If this particular subject, or any other issue, generates some interest, to the point that some of you would like to submit views of your own, please be assured that a written contribution will be welcome.

Interscholastic Athletics...Yes

Agatha Lubbers

My task is to state affirmatively the case for interscholastic athletics in Reformed Christian Schools – particularly the senior high school. Should parents and school personnel be earnest and industrious in their efforts to provide opportunities for intersch-

lastic athletics as an important and necessary extracurricular activity for Christian high school students?

At the outset the following premises must be affirmed.

1. Reformed Christian Schools are good and are faithful to their task in so far as they are Reformed and always reforming. This means simply that our Christian schools must view the task in terms of the total educational mission of the school.

2. The school educates the whole man. It also educates the whole man for life in the competitive society in which the redeemed Christian is now called to live. The Christian is called, therefore, to sanctify all areas of life with godly conduct. We are in this world but not of it. We are called by the Holy Scriptures to do all we do heartily, as to the Lord. We are called to live so that we glorify God in our bodies for they are temples of the Holy Spirit. By the whole of our conduct we must testify our gratitude to God for His blessings. We belong to Jesus. We are His property.

3. The classwork of the Christian student emphasizes the individual rather than the group. Because athletics tend to emphasize the group rather than the individual, interscholastic athletics can provide valuable experiences and training in giving leadership and in getting others to cooperate on legitimate projects.

* * * * *

The issue is really this: Is the interscholastic athletic program the "rudder" that determines the course of the ship or is it one of the important sails that serve to move the ship in the proper direction of training the whole man of God to be thoroughly furnished unto every good work? Does the interscholastic athletic program sponsored by the school help and serve in the educational mission of the school so that our young people may be piously and religiously educated?

The topic of extracurricular athletics in the school has received exposure recently in a study distributed by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFSHSA). The study, called "The Case For High School Activities," states that there are three basic benefits from Interscholastic Activities. This includes athletics.

1. Activities Support the Academic Mission of the Schools. They are not a diversion but rather an extension of a good educational program. Students who participate in activities programs tend to have high grade-point averages, better attendance

records, lower drop-out rates, and fewer discipline problems than students generally.

2. Activities Are Inherently Educational. Activities programs provide valuable lessons on many practical situations – teamwork, sportsmanship, winning and losing, and hard work. Through participation in interscholastic activities students learn self-discipline, build self-confidence, and develop skills to handle competitive situations so they become responsible adults and productive citizens.

3. Activities Foster Success in Later Life. Participation in high school activities is often a predictor of later success – in college, a career, and becoming a contributing member of society.

> The American College Testing Service compared the value of four factors in predicting success after high school. "Success" was defined as self satisfaction and participation in a variety of community activities two years after college. *The one yardstick that could be used to predict later success in life was achievement in school activities.* Not useful as predictors were high grades in high school, high grades in college, or high ACT scores.

Although this study was in no way meant to deprecate the effort of students to earn a high GPA, it does show the importance of participation in high school activities.

The NFSHSA study, called "The Case for High School Activities," also asked and answered several important questions. Following are two of the questions and abbreviated answers.

1. Are there statistics that show the value of participating in high school activities?

Yes, there are many. In 1985 the National Federation sponsored a national survey of high school principals and nearly 7,000 high school students in all 50 U.S. states. Following are a few of the results of the survey conducted by Indiana University in cooperation with the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

– 95% of all high school principals believe that participation in activities teaches valuable lessons to students that cannot be learned in regular class routine.

– 95% agreed that activities programs contribute to the development of "school spirit" among the student body.

– 76% said they believe the demand made on students' time by activities is not excessive.

A survey of high school students revealed the following:

— A majority said that participating in school activities is a very important part of their high school education.

— 63% said that activities contribute greatly to school spirit.

— 65% said that activities helped to make high school much more enjoyable.

2. What evidence is there that students who are involved in activities make higher grades and have better attendance?

The study of NFSHSA gave findings of five groups to document the link between participation in activities and high grades/better attendance. We can cite only one.

— Higher grades and better attendance are evident in students who participate in activities, according to a study by the Minnesota State High School League. The survey, involving more than 300 schools in the state, showed that the average student had a grade-point average of 2.68 (on a 4.0 scale). The grade point average of student-athletes was 2.84, while fine arts students average 2.98. In attendance, the average student was absent 8.76 days a year. Athletes were absent even less — 7.44 days. Fine arts participants were absent only 6.94 days a year.

I contend that the high school student should be given the opportunity to participate in a properly managed athletic program that will help him or her to develop physically, academically, and by God's grace spiritually. The idolatry resulting from interscholastic athletics should not be condoned but should be dethroned. In everything we do and especially in our play we should serve our Lord Christ. In this arena we must fight against all idolatry and testify by the whole of our conduct our gratitude to God for having made us His property.

Miss Lubbers is principal of Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Interscholastic Athletics. . .No

Gary VanDer Schaaf

The topic of interscholastic sport is a very emotional one. Interscholastic sport is so much a part of our North American culture that to speak against it, even in Protestant Reformed circles, is

Mr. VanDer Schaaf is a junior high teacher in Adams Street Christian School, in Grand Rapids.