RUNNING TO GOD

A COLLECTION OF PRAYERS FOR SPORT

NATIONAL CENTRE FOR EVANGELISATION

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A COLLECTION OF PRAYERS FOR SPORT

Personal or small group prayers written for and by athletes, coaches, officials, parents and spectators

NATIONAL CENTRE FOR EVANGELISATION

www.nce.catholic.org.au/sport

Running to God: A Collection of Prayers for Sport is published by the National Centre for Evangelisation, an agency of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference.

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CANBERRA ACT 2601
P: 1300 432 484
www.nce.catholic.org.au

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ISBN: 978-0-909246-45-7

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Imprimatur: + The Most Rev Christopher Prowse
Archbishop of Canberra and Goulburn
13 November 2024

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INTRODUCTION

Sport or ‘competitive play’ is present in all cultures. Australians pride themselves on a being ‘a sporting nation’.

Sport is a human good affirming both talent and limitation which we rejoice in and learn from. “How can the Church not be interested in sport?” (Pope Pius XII, 1945).

The Church has always engaged with sport. St Paul used sporting analogies to illustrate progress in a virtuous life (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). This echoed Jesus’ call to fullness of life (John 10:10). Our original dignity as a body, mind and soul unity was disfigured by the first sin, then restored in Jesus Christ. Christian faith is both a noun and a verb. It is manifest in love of God and neighbour and is our founded hope for eternal life in Christ. Living in faith, hope and love grounds and perfects the cardinal human virtues which sport encourages, namely, prudence (choosing to do the ‘right thing’), justice (affording others their due), fortitude (constancy under

PHOTO CREDIT: PEXELS: LAURA RINCÓN

challenge) and temperance (mastery over our instincts) (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1804-1832). Living a 'good life' is also nurtured (or not) through our aspirations, opportunities and imagination, and above all in our relationships. Sport both reveals and shapes character. Moreover, and foundational to our journey as a pilgrim people in Christ – "the Way, the Truth and the Life" (John 14:6) – is our renewal through the Sacraments and personal prayer. Encountering Christ leads to discipleship and mission, and sport is a rich field for evangelisation.

The Church is clear that sport has great potential to contribute to the development of the individual and to a more harmonious society. Pope Paul VI, in an address to cyclists in 1964, said the Church "sees in sport a gymnasium of the spirit… and because of this it admires, approves, and encourages the practice of sport in its various forms". The Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), hoped that increasing leisure time would see sport help "fortify the health of soul and body… and to establish fraternal relations among men of all conditions, nations and races" (n. 61). Pope John Paul II, a keen sportsman in his younger days, told a gathering of sports leaders in 1979: "Sport has in itself an important moral and educative significance: it is a training ground of virtue". Speaking to children in 2014, Pope Francis said: "I invite you not only to play, like you already do, but there is something more: challenge yourself in the game of life like you are in the game of sports. Challenge yourself in the quest for good, in both Church and society, without fear, with courage and enthusiasm". Little wonder our schools constantly affirm sports as part of an integral education for life.

Draw on the prayers and reflections that follow to see sport as an encounter with the One who calls all into new life.

Monsignor John Woods
Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn
Canberra Raiders Chaplain and Life Member

PHOTO CREDIT: COURTESY CANBERRA RAIDERS

TOMISLAV USKOK

A-LEAGUE - MACARTHUR FC

"Every morning I start the day in prayer
and end my day in the same way.
I pray the Rosary every day.
It gives me peace
and helps me centre my life on Christ.
In a professional sporting environment
there are good times and many bad times
but prayer helps me focus on what's important
and allows me to give thanks
and glory to Our Lord every day."

PHOTO CREDIT: COURTESY MACARTHUR FC

ISUZU
KELME
MACARTHUR
KELME

ORDER FOR THE BLESSING OF AN ATHLETIC EVENT

This blessing is intended for those who participate in an athletic event. The blessing asks that God may protect the athletes from injury and that throughout the event they may show respect for one another.

The blessing may be given by a priest, deacon, or a lay minister.

ORDER OF BLESSING

All make the sign of the cross as the minister says:

- Blessed be the name of the Lord.

All reply:

- Now and for ever.

One of those present or the minister reads a text of sacred Scripture, for example:

- Brothers and sisters, listen to the words of the second letter of Paul to Timothy (4:6-8):
- As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

Or: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 - We win a crown that is imperishable.

PRAYER OF BLESSING

A minister who is a priest or deacon says the prayer of blessing with hands outstretched over the athletes; a lay minister says the prayer with hands joined.

- Strong and faithful God,
  as we come together for this contest,
  we ask you to bless these athletes.

  Keep them safe from injury and harm,
  instil in them respect for each other,
  and reward them for their perseverance.

  Lead us all to the rewards of your kingdom
  where you live and reign for ever and ever.

- R. Amen.

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DONNA MACFARLANE

2006 COMMONWEALTH GAMES BRONZE MEDALIST
2008 OLYMPIAN - 3000M STEEPLECHASE

"Athletics and my Catholic faith
have always gone hand-in-hand.
I believe that God gave me a talent to run
and that when I run, I give glory to Him.
Of course, I want to win but when things don't go to plan,
I know I'm loved and there is more to this life.
For me, prayer is connecting with God through music,
quiet time, Mass and the Rosary."

PRAYERS BEFORE A MATCH

PRAYER FOR ATHLETES

Gracious God,
we give thanks for the gift of our bodies,
for the ability to run, walk, jump,
swim, catch and throw.
We pray for patience and discipline,
that we may learn the joy of mastering new skills:
achieving success, and cheerfully bearing failure
in the company of others.

We pray that our relationships be enriched
through the friendships we form.
May we learn to include others across borders
of language, colour, gender and religion.

We pray that we care for others.
May we especially look out for those
who are differently abled,
and those often left on the boundaries.

Through our vigilance
may we always play fair,
and ensure that no one is abused or exploited.

We ask this through Jesus your Son. Amen.

From the Australian Catholic Bishops Social Justice Statement 2014-15.

PRAYER TO BLESSED PIER GIORGIO FRASSATI

Mountain-climber and skier,
horseback rider and swimmer,
cyclist and hiker -
you loved the challenge of sports,
Blessed Pier Giorgio!

Teach me to put all my athletic skill
into proper perspective:
to take time "to contemplate
the greatness of the Creator
in the pure air" as I play,
always remembering that athletes
"have the duty of putting our health
at the service of those who do not have it,
for to act otherwise would be to betray
that gift of God".
Amen.

From "A Book of Prayers in honor of Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati" by Fr Timothy E Deeter. Used with permission.

"During the game, when you are out on the pitch, you display beauty, generosity and camaraderie. If a match lacks these qualities it loses force, even if the team wins."

POPE FRANCIS, ADDRESS TO DELEGATIONS OF THE NATIONAL FOOTBALL TEAMS OF ARGENTINA AND ITALY, 13 AUGUST 2013

PRAYERS AFTER A MATCH

PRAYER IN DEFEAT

Composed by Stephen Lawrence

Thank you, Lord, for the opportunity to participate in this match.
May we learn from the loss and become better next time.
May we keep our eyes on you
and always remember that,
sweet as victory is, service of others
and abiding in you are far more important.
Amen.

Stephen played for Hawthorn in the Australian Football League (AFL) from 1988 to 1998. He is a husband and father of six children.

"Every Christian is called to become a strong athlete of Christ, that is, a faithful and courageous witness to his Gospel. But to succeed in this, he must persevere in prayer, be trained in virtue and follow the divine Master in everything."

POPE JOHN PAUL II, HOMILY,
JUBILEE OF SPORTS PEOPLE, 29 OCTOBER 2000

PRAYER OF GRATITUDE

Composed by Marci Oringo-Vos

Lord of all, we offer to you our match this day.
Let us remember that we are your beloved sons and daughters,
no matter whether we win or fail.
Our identity is in you and you have already won
the ultimate battle against sin and death.
Thank you for giving us strong bodies, hearts and minds
and for our being able to compete today.
You have said that with you all things are possible;
give us the grace to believe this wholeheartedly.
Encourage us in defeat, may we be humble in victory,
and give us the strength to be able to face each day with you.
May we always remember that you are Lord of all
and to place everything we do before you.
Amen.

Marci is a Catholic school teacher and a coach of various sports.

PHOTO CREDIT: UNSPLASH: MAKSYM TYMCHYK

CHLOE ESPOSITO

2016 OLYMPIC GOLD MEDALIST - MODERN PENTATHLON

"Before, during and after competition, I've always prayed to God for His guidance, help and protection. Prayer has helped me remain grounded and to keep things in perspective, knowing that winning isn't everything."

PHOTO CREDIT: SUPPLIED

adidas
AUSTRALIA
Rio2016

PRAYERS FOR OPPONENTS

PRAYER FOR RESPECT

Composed by Qwayne Guevara

Merciful God,
we acknowledge that you created
each one of us uniquely and that we all have dignity.
We pray for our opponents in this game
and ask that you remind us
to play with fairness and respect at all times.
We ask this through Christ, our Lord.
Amen.

Qwayne is the manager of Catholic Youth Parramatta and founder of Embers Basketball ministry.

PHOTO CREDIT: UNSPLASH: JEFFREY F LIN

PRAYER OF SOLIDARITY

Composed by Chloe Esposito

Dear God,
You created all people in your image and likeness,
including all those with whom and against whom I play.
May I always remember that those I compete against
are my brothers and sisters in Christ.
Please help me to treat my opponents with respect,
love and compassion,
even when it becomes difficult to do so.
May my opponents use the skills and talents
that you have blessed them with
to the best of their abilities.
And when our match is over,
help us to see in one another the face of Jesus, your Son,
in whose name we make this prayer.
Amen.

Chloe is an Olympic gold medalist (2016) in the modern pentathlon.

"Sports, properly directed, develops character, makes a person courageous, a generous loser, and a gracious victor; it refines the senses, gives intellectual penetration, and steels the will to endurance."

POPE PIUS XII,
SPORT AT THE SERVICE OF THE SPIRIT, 29 JULY 1945

PRAYERS FOR ATHLETES WHEN INJURED

PRAYER OF SURRENDER

Composed by Tomislav Uskok

Merciful Father,
you blessed me with the gifts and love of sport.
You know the difficulty and pain I endure now during this injury.
Help me to trust you in all my worries,
and help me to lean on you even more in my recovery.
I humbly pray your healing hand may descend upon me
and strengthen me during this time.
O Jesus, I surrender all my fear, pain and anxiety to you.
St Joseph, pray for us.
Amen.

Tomislav plays in the A-League for Macarthur FC.

"The practice of a sport also teaches us not to be discouraged and to start again with determination after a defeat or injury."

POPE FRANCIS, ADDRESS TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE ANNUAL CONGRESS OF THE EUROPEAN CYCLING UNION, 9 MARCH 2019

PHOTO CREDIT: PEXELS: PAVEL DANILYUK

PRAYER FOR HEALING

Composed by Donna MacFarlane

Dear Lord,
I call out to you in my suffering and you hear me.
In your mercy, please restore and strengthen me.
Help me to fix my eyes on you
and trust that you have a plan for me
that is greater than I could imagine.
Help me to know that I am loved beyond measure.
Thank you for this opportunity to learn patience
and to be your witness.
For yours is the power, the kingdom and the glory
for ever and ever.
Amen.

Donna is a Commonwealth Games bronze medalist (2006) and Olympic athlete (2008) in the 3000m steeplechase.

McGrath
Strathfield

PHOTO CREDIT: COURTESY WESTS TIGERS RUGBY LEAGUE FOOTBALL PTY LTD

ADAM DOUEIHI

NRL - WESTS TIGERS

"God has been showing me that my talents on the field and love for Jesus are part of a much bigger plan, and through patience, humility, prayer, faithful dedication and training, my faith has been a constant companion throughout my league journey."

PRAYERS FOR COACHES

PRAYER FOR GUIDANCE

Composed by Fr Paul Crotty

Lord, heavenly Father,
giver of gifts human and divine,
guide leaders and coaches to discover
the skills and talents of those in their care.
Give them the words and example
to inspire the young to participate in sport
and to develop their human qualities
in an environment that is safe and encouraging to all.
Moved by the Holy Spirit, I ask this with confidence
in the name of your only Son, Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Fr Paul is a priest in the Diocese of Port Pirie, a former Australian rules footballer, umpire and coach.

"In a world in which we often painfully recognise the presence of youth who are lifeless, marked by sadness and negative experiences, you can be for them, wise friends, expert guides and coaches, not only on the playing field, but also along those paths that lead to a finish line of the true values of life."

POPE JOHN PAUL II, ADDRESS TO THE DIRECTORS AND PLAYERS
OF THE ITALIAN SOCCER TEAM MILAN, 12 MAY 1979

PRAYER FOR GRACE-FILLED LEADERSHIP

Composed by Marci Oringo-Vos

Lord God, as I strive to coach this team well,
I ask that you give me the grace to be able to do so.
Let me be able to set strong goals, that as a team
we may achieve and grow.
Give me the capacity to develop alongside them
and to be always ready to learn something new.
As I lead, teach me how to empower
each member of my team.
Show me how to put the good of all above my own glory.
Regardless of victory or defeat,
may I maintain a positive attitude towards my athletes,
acknowledging their efforts and recognising that,
in areas where they may have fallen short,
there lies not a failure but an opportunity for growth.
Be in my words, Lord;
show me how to communicate and lead effectively.
Teach me how to be an authentic witness to them.
Let me follow your example, to “wash feet”,
to stand up for what is right and to be just in my decisions.
And at the end of the day, Lord, I entrust them to you,
asking that you draw them closer to yourself.
Amen.

PRAYERS FOR OFFICIALS

PHOTO CREDIT: PEXELS: VOLODYMYR KOROL

PRAYER FOR WISDOM

Composed by Colm McCaughan

Lord my God, thank you for this opportunity
to officiate at this match.
Grant that I may have the wisdom of your Spirit
to discern my decisions wisely.
Give me a spirit of calmness when there is pressure.
Give me a spirit of forgiveness
when players and spectators disagree with or abuse me.
Give me a spirit of courage to make the tough decisions.
And finally, give all of us here
a spirit of joy in taking part in this match.
You, Lord, who are with us in all aspects of our lives, be with me now!
I make this prayer in Jesus' name.
Amen.

Colm is a religious education coordinator in NSW,
a rugby union referee and a cricketer.

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Composed by Fr Steve Ardill

God of life, you give us games, sports and recreation
to care for our bodies, recreate ourselves anew,
and to grow in relationship with you and one another.
I thank you for the opportunities I've been given
and the abundant joy I've experienced as an official.
Help me to always remember that I am only a servant of the game.
With your help, may I strive to always witness enthusiastically to my faith,
be the best decision-maker I can be and humbly admit my mistakes.
May my interactions with the participants always be respectful.
May I contribute positively to the creation of a safe playing environment
and the enjoyment of the players, team officials and spectators.
And, at the final whistle, may I exit the field
knowing that I've given my all for the game
and most importantly for your greater glory.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Fr Steve is a priest in the Diocese of Port Pirie
and an Australian rules football umpire.

"[Volunteers] keep alive, through their choices and their testimony, a culture of gift and a style of gratuitousness; they help sport to remain service-oriented for others, not only focused on the economic and bureaucratic dimension."

GIVING THE BEST OF YOURSELF: A DOCUMENT ON THE CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON SPORT AND THE HUMAN PERSON, 2018

JENNY BRINKWORTH

MOTHER OF MADDY PROUD
SUPER NETBALL - NEW SOUTH WALES SWIFTS

"Prayer is something that has always come naturally to me and I have gained a lot of comfort from praying for God's help when I am anxious or worried about the people I love. That's why, when my children are playing sport at the elite level – and it is such a big part of their life – I pray that they will do well and not get injured. But I also pray that if things go wrong, they will have the strength and resilience to deal with those obstacles and setbacks."

PHOTO CREDIT: SUPPLIED

PRAYERS FOR PARENTS

PRAYER OF BLESSING

Composed by Stephen Lawrence

Heavenly Father,
thank you that my child is participating
with these other children in their team.
Thank you for their friendships
and the opportunity to delight in physical movement,
for the joy of competition,
and the grace to develop their abilities and character.
Bless and protect them as they compete,
and may they strive to focus on
the ultimate victory of eternal happiness in you,
the prize won by Jesus on the cross
and through His Resurrection.
Amen.

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PHOTO CREDIT: PEXELS: LAURA RINCÓN

PRAYER FOR RESILIENCE

Composed by Jenny Brinkworth

Loving God of wisdom and compassion,
thank you for giving our children the skill and talent
to perform at a high level
and the opportunity to bring joy to others
through their actions on and off the sports arena.
Give them the strength and resilience
to keep working hard to achieve their goals,
to deal with disappointment
and to overcome any hurdles they might encounter along the way.
Help us to be parents who are supportive and encouraging
but without any pressure.
I ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Jenny is the mother of footballers Max and Douglas and Super Netball player Maddy Proud (New South Wales Swifts).

PRAYERS FOR SPECTATORS

PHOTO CREDIT: JACOB LUND

PRAYER FOR COMPETITORS

Strong and faithful God,
as we gather for this match,
we ask you to bless these athletes.
Keep them safe from injury and harm,
instil in them respect for each other
and reward them for their perseverance.
Give them strength, courage
and faith in the use of their abilities,
as well as good sportsmanship throughout the game.
Lead them and all those who watch this game
to the rewards of your kingdom
where you live and reign for ever and ever.
Amen.

Adapted from a prayer composed by
the Diocese of Wollongong.

PRAYER FOR PEACE AND GOODWILL

Composed by Fr Jackson Saunders

Heavenly Father, we give you thanks
for the joy that sport brings to our lives,
for the opportunity to watch this sporting event
and for the talent of those participating.
Bless us as we come together,
and may this occasion create unity among us.
May peace and goodwill prevail among all -
coaches, players, umpires, officials and spectators.
We make this prayer through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Fr Jackson is a priest in the Diocese of Sandhurst and a sports radio broadcaster.

"The spectator, too, must be capable of respecting the fundamental rule of sport as a fair and generous competition, a meeting place, a bond of solidarity."

POPE JOHN PAUL II,
ADDRESS TO FICEP ASSEMBLY, 3 APRIL 1986

TOKYO

PHOTO CREDIT: SEAN M. HAFFEY VIA GETTY IMAGES

DAMIEN SCHUMANN

2018 COMMONWEALTH GAMES
GOLD MEDALIST
2020 OLYMPIAN - BEACH VOLLEYBALL

"I always pray before every match,
asking God to help me honour Him
by giving my best with the gifts He gave me,
and leaving the results in His hands.
Prayer has been a great way
to calm my nerves before competing
and to reaffirm that I just have to do my best."

COMMON CATHOLIC PRAYERS

OUR FATHER

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come, thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
Amen.

HAIL MARY

Hail, Mary, full of grace,
the Lord is with thee.
Blessed art thou among women
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God,
pray for us sinners,
now and at the hour of our death.
Amen.

GLORY BE

Glory be to the Father
and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning
is now, and ever shall be
world without end.
Amen.

THE APOSTLES CREED

I believe in God,
the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried;
he descended into hell;
on the third day he rose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty;
from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting.
Amen.

HAIL, HOLY QUEEN

Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy,
our life, our sweetness and our hope.
To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve.
To thee do we send up our sighs,
mourning and weeping in this valley of tears.
Turn then, most gracious advocate,
thine eyes of mercy toward us,
and after this our exile
show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.

SCRIPTURE ON SPORT

PHOTO CREDIT: DIOCESE OF PARRAMATTA

Using the Bible to pray can be a great way to connect with the messages in the Scriptures. This requires reading and re-reading Scripture passages and spending time in reflection and prayer.

Below are some passages from the Bible that are particularly relevant for athletes. You may like to reflect on and pray with these passages.

> *Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.*
>
> **1 Corinthians 3:16-17**

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it. Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one. So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air; but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you.

Philippians 3:12-15

But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

1 Timothy 6:11-12

As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

2 Timothy 4:6-8

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.

Hebrews 12:1

Lord Jesus Christ, help these athletes to be your friends and witnesses to your love. Help them to put the same effort into personal asceticism that they do into sports; help them to achieve a harmonious and cohesive unity of body and soul.

May they be sound models to imitate for all who admire them. Help them always to be athletes of the spirit, to win your inestimable prize: an imperishable crown that lasts forever. Amen!

ST JOHN PAUL II'S HOMILY FOR THE JUBILEE OF SPORTS PEOPLE, OCTOBER 2000

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