

## FOR THE LOVE OF THE SPORT?: THE OLYMPIC FIGURE SKATING FIASCO

The *Wall Street Journal* contained an [sobering article](#) about the Russian figure skating fiasco, and it makes a compelling case for change. Consider the immediate reaction of Russian 17-year-old **Alexandra Trusova**, who had just won a Silver Medal in the Women's individual competition. She completely fell apart exclaiming, "**I hate this sport.**" And the Soviet winner of the Gold? Well, she showed absolutely **no sign** of celebration whatsoever when it became clear that she would finish first. And the heavy favorite for Gold—15-year-old Kamila Valieva—stumbled and fell, finishing out of medal contention. After her routine, she was scolded by her coach, Eteri Tutberidze, who demanded: "Why did you stop fighting?" The answer was obvious everyone—**except** the coaches! Their overbearing demeanor has **ruined** the sport, robbing the competition of all joy, completely contrary to the spirit of the Olympics.

Since 1972, I've been smitten by the **Olympics**. I loved trying to identify the national **flags** in the opening ceremony. I witnessed spirited competition in varying events, including lesser-known ones that piqued my curiosity. Curling, bobsled and the biathlon in winter; equestrian, badminton, table tennis and rowing in the summer games. While the traditional sports fill the airwaves, the games provide a stage for others to enjoy their special moment in the spotlight. But increasingly, that spotlight reveals an **underlying sickness** plaguing the Olympics. According to another [WSJ article](#), the cost to train an Alpine (downhill) skier throughout a junior ski racing career approaches **\$500,000**? How is this possible? For starters, some parents are flying their kids to New Zealand for offseason training, getting a head start for competitions that begin in early October here. Add in travel to U.S. competitions—it all adds up.

U.S. skiers had their **worst showing** (men and women) since **1988**, winning just one Silver Medal (Ryan Cochran-Siegle) out of a possible 30 individual medals. It was a far cry from the **2010** Games in Canada, in which U.S. skiers were awarded **ten medals**. The sport has both shifted to the extremely wealthy, and fallen in popularity with the emergence of snowboarding, which made its first Olympic appearance in 1998. Natural evolution of sports is part of the process, but the "professionalization" of amateur sports has troubled me for many years. The real question may be, "What is the purpose of amateur sports?" Lest I be seen as merely venting or settling into my role as a curmudgeon, I ought to provide an answer. Here, the Church offers a **healthy perspective**, underappreciated for far too long. Albeit with caveats, the Church unabashedly upholds the **dignity of sports**. Sports even appear in stained glass! (See below)

The Vatican Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life published a 2018 document entitled "Giving the best of yourself: a Document on the Christian perspective on sport and the human person." Peruse the document [here](#). It notes that in **1904**, Pope **St. Pius X** opened the Vatican doors to sports by hosting a youth gymnastics event. It also quotes Pope **St. Paul VI**, who in an address to the members of the International Olympic Committee said: "Physical effort, moral qualities, love for peace: on these three points the **dialogue** that the Church maintains with the world of sport is sincere and friendly. Our desire is that it is ever wider and more fruitful." (28 April 1966) It ups the **ante** when discussing Pope **St. John Paul II's** role in fostering a healthy view of athletics. During the Jubilee year of 2000, he spoke before **80,000 athletes** at Rome's Olympic Stadium. And in 2004, he established a new **Vatican office** to promote a Christian vision of sports and its potential for fostering fellowship and evangelization.

In 1968, U.S. figure skating legend **Peggy Fleming** dazzled the audience with a flawless gold

medal performance in Grenoble, France. Her mother even suggested a **color** for her skating outfit—**chartreuse** in homage to the nearby 11th century Carthusian monastery, *Grande Chartreuse*. She once said, “Love your sport. Never do it to **please someone else**; it has to be yours. That is all that will justify the hard work.” This is sound advice. A question worth asking centers upon how to raise a child in a **healthy** way, including one who is extremely gifted in athletics or other areas. Over-specialization is dangerous. Experience reveals an **equal opportunity cancer** that cuts across activities from chess to piano, spelling bees to hockey tournaments, resulting in early “burn out” for children who become resentful.

Unquestionably, the Church encourages a healthy appreciation of sports. We are beings composed of **body and soul** and staying physically active is an **integral** part of the human experience that fosters teamwork, brings joy and provides a healthy sense of competition. However, unless we allow our children to **gravitate naturally** towards activities—instead of pressuring them— it is possible that we will do them irreparable harm. Think it will be easy for the three Russian skaters to recover any sense of wonder, awe and joy from utilizing their God given talents? I fear that they have been **scarred** for many years to come. Even Saint Paul himself noted: “Every athlete exercises discipline in every way. They do it to win a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one.” (1 Corinthians 9:25) Let’s learn our lessons and keep our priorities straight!

- Speaking of discipline—Lent is all about developing greater spiritual discipline over a more extended period of time. Embrace it and do not fear. Join us for Ash Wednesday. We are offering three Masses: **7:00 a.m. | 12:00 Noon | 5:15 p.m.** The final Mass will be celebrated by Archbishop Hebda and accompanied by our Cathedral Schola.
- Today is the 2022 **Catholic Services Appeal** commitment weekend. Our homily this weekend strives to give the rationale for the appeal, consistent with our Catholic faith. Envelopes may be found in the pews— you will all be given time to fill these out and deposit them in the four gold drop boxes located at both the Selby and Dayton Avenue exits. Each year I am **humbled** by your **generosity**. Our 2022 parish goal is **\$70,726**. Thank you in advance for your support!
- Cathedral trendsetters? There is a stained-glass window in the **Gloucester Cathedral** (England) dating to **1340 A.D.** that appears to show a golfer! Historians scratch their heads because the window is 60 years before the earliest known mention of golf is found in a Scottish record. It may have been the old English game of Cambuca, a predecessor of Golf. Or perhaps the Church was ahead of its time.
- The **Fraternity of St. Peter** celebrates the traditional Latin Mass (1962 Missal) and sacraments. The group was founded by traditionalist priests who, after the unauthorized episcopal consecration of four bishops by Archbishop Lefebvre of the SSPX in 1988, desired to remain faithful to the Roman Pontiff. The FSSP received confirmation that even after *Traditionis Custodes*, “the faculty to celebrate the sacrifice of the Mass, and to carry out the sacraments and other sacred rites” remains in force.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,  
Rector



Stained-glass golfer?  
**Gloucester Cathedral**  
England ca. 1340 A.D.  
Red arrows indicate  
a stick and a ball.