

The Effect of Team Sports in Classical, Christian Education

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HAVE APPROVED THIS THESIS  
**THE EFFECT OF TEAM SPORTS IN CLASSICAL, CHRISTIAN EDUCATION**

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## ABSTRACT

Antoine de Saint-Exupery once noted *if you want to build a ship, don't drum up the men to gather wood, divide the work, and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea* ("A quote by Antoine de Saint-Exupery," n.d.). This quote embodies the goal of classical education, but it also parallels the values taught in sport. There has been a resurgence of classical education in recent years, and these new schools are focusing on instilling in students a love for learning, a passion for truth and beauty, and a simultaneous prudent understanding of and appreciation for the world around them (Caldecott, 2012). Is there a place, in classical, Christian education, for learning these virtues through sport? Strong academics should always be the driving force behind any secondary school, and research shows that children who are involved in sports in adolescence reap physical benefits and make strides in the areas of morality and virtue (Ball, Bice, & Parry, 2016; Schmid, 2012). **The purpose of this study is to answer the question: do team sports reinforce the values emphasized in classical, Christian education?** The researcher used a qualitative method of study through an opinion-based online questionnaire that featured open-ended questions. Athletic directors from over 20 classical, Christian schools sent out the survey to their alumni, and 47 responses were received. The responses were overwhelmingly in favor of sports reinforcing the virtues taught in an academic setting, therefore the conclusion drawn is that sports play a vital role in supporting the focus of academics in a classical, Christian school.

*Key words:* classical education, team sports, virtue, truth, beauty

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## **CHAPTER ONE: Introduction**

### **History of Classical Education**

Classical, Christian education has a rich history. In an article criticizing the loss of the classics in modern education, Howe (2011) says

Ever since the Middle Ages, a classical education had represented a synthesis of reason and virtue. Classical history and literature presented a panoply of heroes to admire and celebrate. Roman writers such as Cicero and the two Catos embodied not only the stern and self-denying virtues that appealed to Christian mentors but also republican values with special relevance to Americans, such as devotion to the commonwealth rather than to any special interest or faction. Besides, the effort of mastering the rigorous logic and grammar required to conjugate Latin verbs and decline nouns was itself regarded as a tool to teach young people self-discipline (Howe, 2011).

This style of education has a three-fold focus: grammar, logic, and rhetoric. These three stages are referred to as the Trivium. Each stage of the Trivium has a different focus while all centering a united purpose which is to “cultivate virtue and wisdom” (“Principles of Classical Education,” 2017). In the grammar stage (usually from k-5<sup>th</sup>), students are taught WHAT, in the logic stage (6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup>), students are taught HOW and WHY, and finally in the rhetoric stage (9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>), students are taught to take the what, how, and why and use them to clearly articulate thoughts using wisdom and truth through a biblical frame of reference. “The ultimate end of classical, Christian education is to enable the student (disciple) to better know, glorify, and enjoy God” (“Principles of

Classical Education,” 2017). The Association of Classical Christian Schools (ACCS) has 280 members ranging in size from three students to over 1,200 in grades kindergarten through twelfth grade, with most schools falling in the 100 to 300 student range (“Find a School,” 2017). This shows the importance of small class size and family environment within classical, Christian education.

Classical, Christian education incorporates a love for beauty, poetic knowledge, and symbolism through a Christian worldview (Caldecott, 2009). This type of education focuses heavily on humanities, including studying Latin and ancient history and literature. Because of this emphasis on the humanities, sport can become an after-thought in the life of the classical school. However, not only can beauty be found and appreciated through athletics, but morality can be taught through sport (Schmid, 2012). Since ancient Greece, the athlete has been praised and idolized for his athletic form and prowess (Reid, 2012). Pictures, paintings, and statues that depict athletes from this era show a beauty not only in figure but also in their posture. Their arms outstretched with a humility in their faces creates a near-religious experience for the viewer (Reid). The athlete who pursues excellence in the face of adversity while achieving greatness through meekness, servanthood, sportsmanship, and joy; this is the true beauty of athletics.

The Greeks were among the first to make sport a part of their educational system, and this was continued by successive cultures who based their educational system on the classical method through more modern times. The British began using sport in the 17<sup>th</sup> century as a way to prepare the young men for later occupations such as generals or politicians (Schneider, 2016). Modern classical education is modeled on the same structure of these ancient civilizations. Not only did these societies integrate sport into

education, but they placed inherent value on those who participated in sport. The most widely publicized sporting event in modern history, the Olympic Games, originated in Greece in the first century, and then was later revitalized in Greece in 1896 (Woods, 2011). The Games sought to signify the pinnacle of spiritual and physical achievement, as well as encourage harmonious international relationships (Pitsios, 2008).

While most students in the secondary education system today are not training for the Olympics, it is important to note how the ancient Greeks placed value on sport as a part of educating a child. Classical, Christian education's goal is to awaken a sense of wonder in students, guide them to find truth through the awe-inspiring moments, and then launch them into the greater world to discover wisdom and beauty as life-long learners (Caldecott, 2009). Becoming a life-long learner does not just apply to the mind or spirit, but also to the body. Researchers found that students who participated in high school sports had many more days of physical activity as adults, creating life-long healthy habits (Ball, Bice, & Parry, 2016). Classical, Christian education stands apart in its emphasis on developing the whole person and building life-long virtues.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this research was to examine the team sport experience and evaluate whether sports strengthen or diminish the specific values encouraged in classical, Christian education. Being involved in a classical, Christian school is what sparked the interest in discovering how sports positively or adversely affect the overall high school experience for each student. Because the pursuit of wisdom, truth, and beauty are bedrock in the educational experience for the classical student, the goal was to give student-athletes the opportunity to assess whether or not those values are bolstered

through sports. The classical, Christian school has a unique method of instructing students, and the purpose of this research was to evaluate whether that translated onto the court or field. A qualitative research approach was chosen utilizing an online questionnaire which had many open-ended questions that allowed the respondents to reflect on their sporting experience in a classical, Christian school. The basis for this type of research was grounded theory. The desire was to develop a theory that was rooted or established in observation that was deduced from the answers to the survey questions. Information was collected from a group of individuals who fit into a specific category. The study was designed to compare and contrast values taught in the classroom versus values taught on the field/court from athletes in classical, Christian schools.

### **Key Terms**

**Classical education** is a movement that attempts to instill wisdom and virtue in each child, that believes there is order and reason in the world that should be discovered, and that studies humanities and mathematics through the filter of their ancient roots in Greece and Rome (“What is classical education,” 2016). The **truth** to be ascertained through classical education is how exactly all creation gleans its nature from the Divine (Turley, 2014). **Virtue**, or *arête*, is the characteristic used to describe someone who not only perseveres with excellence, but accomplishes his or her goals in an ethically trustworthy manner (Morgan, 2007; Miller, 2004).

Immanuel Kant was a philosopher who explored ethics through a deontology view point, which affirmed the idea that there was a God who created a universal moral code of which we could all adhere (“Immanuel Kant,” n.d.). Schmid (2012) addressed many ideas within the Kantian Theory of Sport. He described “the beautiful and the

sublime in the sport-experience” (Schmid). At the Association of Classical and Christian Schools (ACCS) Conference in the summer of 2016, there was a session called “the experience of the sublime.” In this session, Grant Horner, a well-known philosopher and educator in the classical community, described a truly sublime experience as something that moves beyond attraction and can even overwhelm and destroy, which brings a person into the presence of the infinite (Horner, 2016). It creates an atmosphere where a person has walked through the glorious, been elevated to the transcendental, or seen the majestic be exalted. This is what the author of Job was saying when in chapter 37 he said “Listen to this Job; stop and consider God’s wonders. Do you know how God controls the clouds and makes his lightning flash? Do you know how the clouds hang poised, those wonders of him who has perfect knowledge?” (Society & International, 2007). He was asking Job to think about the sublime, that which can create **beauty** and destruction. So many athletes experience this when they step on a field or court of play. They have the opportunity to produce beauty, feel the weight of glory and the agony of defeat, and ultimately be so overcome with emotion that words cannot be spoken to explain the reality.

Woods (2011) defined sport to be a “competitive activity that involves physical skill and specialized facilities or equipment and is conducted according to an accepted set of rules to determine a winner” (Woods, p.7). **Team sports** involves players acting in ways that are independent, dependent, or interdependent between each other to pursue a common goal of winning a game or match (Keidel, 2014). Sport, when suitably implemented, can teach fair play, endurance, teamwork, respect for authority and rules, humility, and charity (Acuna Delgado & Acuna Gomez, 2011).

## **Looking Ahead**

In the following chapters, the goal is to build on the information introduced in Chapter one. Chapter two is a literature review that features articles about the secondary sport experience and also classical education. There is very little information and research regarding sports AND the classical, Christian education experience. It is a goal of this research to add to the body of knowledge for classical, Christian educators. Chapter three is a description of the methodology, and chapter four will analyze the results of the survey. The information presented will recount why grounded theory was the best method of research and will also provide an analysis of the results received from the participants in the study. Finally, Chapter five will provide a discussion on the information discovered in the study as well as address the limitations of the study. There will also be several suggestions on topics recommended for further study.

## **CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review**

There are many positive outcomes that may arise from children playing sports at the secondary education level. There is a large body of evidence that highlights the benefits of playing sports, and many of these studies will be listed in this paper. However, there is very little research that look specifically at the classically educated student. It is the goal of this paper to give a broad overview of the research regarding sports in secondary education, but also to shed light on the athletic experience of a student who attended a classical, Christian school. There is also some information in the “virtues in sport” section that lays out the argument that many virtues, such as discipline, competing well, beauty, and morality, can be taught through sport. These are virtues that are valued in classical, Christian education.

### **Sports in Secondary Education**

Fornieris, Camire, and Williamson (2015) designed a study to look at the effect of the level of participation in one or more high school extracurricular activities on a student’s evolving maturity as well as his or her interaction with the school as a whole. Participants in this study were gathered from several schools in Ontario, Canada, and they were a mix of students at every grade level in high school. Of the 239 participants, 57% were female and 43% were male. Fifty students were pulled from grades 9-11, while 79 were from the twelfth grade. A handful of others declared themselves fifth year students. All these students were placed into groups by the author of the study based on level of involvement. The groups were sports only, extracurricular activities that were not sports-related, those that did both, and those that were involved in no extracurricular activities (sport or otherwise).

The researcher chose a cross-sectional/survey design method. The method was effective because they could simultaneously send the information to a wide range of people in the area, and it is also a convenient method of study (Jones, 2015). A survey was sent via email to various coaches and principals in high schools in the Ontario area. The findings revealed that those involved in extracurricular activities scored higher in the areas of commitment to learning, positive values, empowerment, social competencies, and positive identity (Forneris, Camire, & Williamson, 2015).

A different study, also conducted in Canada, compared the availability of sports at the secondary level to overall physical activity levels (Fuller, Sabiston, Karp, Barnett, & O'Loughlin, 2011). Physical data was taken for three months from 10 secondary Montreal schools using 808 children from 13 to 17 years of age. School administrators finished questionnaires citing the number of intramural and extramural sports available to the participants, and the subjects were classified by their physical activity, age, sex, BMI, mother's education level, and socio-economic status. This study revealed that adolescents in schools that offered more sports chose more vigorous activities throughout the week more often than those students who were in schools that had fewer options. The study concluded that schools should implement many opportunities for students to engage in sports because it encouraged consistent physical activity (Fuller et. al). International studies demonstrate that these benefits are the results of sports programs themselves and not some other aspect of North American educational system.

In a study designed for sport participation in secondary schools among teenage girls, Nicoleta (2014) found that physical education and sport participation contributed to the development of personalities, as well as a whole educational system, and helped to

create girls who were highly-functioning members of their communities. The researcher used an opinion questionnaire with 120 students ages 16-18 living in Bucharest. With two experimental groups and one control group, the study found that physical appearance, improved health, physical resistance, self-respect, and humor were among the top reasons the subjects found value in playing sports. These are just three of many studies demonstrating immediate and wide-ranging benefits to participation in sports programs. There are clearly benefits to students who participate in sports, and these benefits extend far beyond those directly connected to athletics. Scripture mentions that God gives everyone different talents, and extracurricular activities, specifically sports, have a way of highlighting those abilities, which is why they can be so important.

### **Long-term Effects of Sport**

In addition to immediate benefits, Coakley (2011) found there were also contributing factors to success in life other than the initial claim that sports bring about positive development. As previously mentioned, playing sports can improve over-all health and life-long fitness and promote such values as teamwork and a great work ethic. His research also shows that the types of sports played, the role of parents and coaches, social relationships, and personal sport experiences can affect the “positive” influence playing a sport has on the subject’s life (Coakley).

Harris, Hines, Mayes, Thomas, and Bagley (2016) orchestrated a study to look at how black male student athletes balance athletics and academics. The purpose of the study was to interview three black, male students on their academic experiences in relation to their sports participation and what made them successful. Participants in the study were chosen by athletic department personnel from east coast universities, and the

purposive method and snowball method of selection was used for this study. These methods employ non-random or even hand-picked candidates for the chosen study, and it works for this study because the authors needed a specific type of person that met several different criteria, including being a Division 1 intercollegiate athlete currently enrolled with proven academic success while in high school.

The researcher chose to utilize a semi-structured interview format with each candidate. In this interview format, the interviewer begins with a series of questions to be asked but adapts the questions throughout the interview to attain more information (Jones, 2015). They were asked to speak about their athletic and academic experiences in high school through a sequence of open-ended questions already said. The researchers sought to identify who influenced each candidate academically and also how sports participation influenced the candidates' overall demeanor and success in life. The results of the study showed three overarching themes in each candidate's life that produced success athletically and academically. The first theme was having a supportive family. This came into play particularly when the student-athlete was being recruited for college. The second was a supportive school system that provided structure, and teachers, administrators, and counselors who believed in their ability to succeed. One candidate even cited times when a teacher or coach prayed with him about an issue. The third theme was the ability for each athlete to take ownership over his own academic and athletic success. In classical, Christian education, educators seek to teach the whole child, and as they grow in maturity, they also grow in wisdom. This third point emphasizes that sports have a way of helping the student-athlete to achieve that type of maturity. It is important to remember the influence a teacher can have on a student. In particular, a

Christian educator has incredible opportunities to greatly impact these students. Christian educators, many times, are coaches as well. This opens up numerous doors for the teacher/coach to emphasize a love for learning and wisdom in the classroom, but he or she can reiterate the same principles in practices or games.

A third study looking at long term benefits was conducted by Camire and Kendellen (2015) and examined former high school athletes' developmental experiences. The authors used an inductive approach in the form of interviews utilizing 14 former high school athletes between 18 and 28 years of age ( $M = 23.0$ ,  $SD = 2.66$ ). The participants of the study were intentionally selected from various regions of Ontario, with the max age of 28 so that each person could recall with ease his or her high school experiences. They were required to have attended a public or private high school in the area and also have competed in at least one full season as an athlete in a sport approved by the high school sport-governing body in Canada. Twelve high school sports were represented among the 14 participants, including volleyball, soccer, basketball, and track and field. When the study was conducted, eight of the participants were enrolled in post-secondary school (either pursuing bachelor's or graduate degree) and six had earned a bachelor's degree and had full-time jobs (Camire & Kendellen, 2015). The data was collected via semi-structured interviews where a variety of questions were asked to gain insight on the positive and negative influences and impacts playing a sport in high school had on each subject.

Camire and Kendellen (2015) found two categories of affirmative life skills were obtained through participating in sports. The participants believed that playing high school sports allowed them to acquire new life skills and also develop and refine existing

skills. New skills included time management, leadership, and social skills. The existing skills that participants identified as improving through sports were work ethic, stress management, and developing responsibility.

### **Virtues in Sport**

As demonstrated in previous sections, sports provide an opportunity for growth in virtue, not just physical ability. This is where classical, Christian education and sports can enhance and support each other. In his reflective essay, Izzo (2010) claimed that sport can and should be a basis for education for individuals. Through competition, a person can acquire discipline, learn how to overcome adversity, maintain friendships through competitiveness, improve the physical condition, and develop character. Pain and struggle are a real and timeless part of the human experience, and *agon* is the ancient Greek term for conflict, struggle, or contest. For the Greeks, this not only meant defeating opponents in athletics but also in war (Jirásek & Hurych, 2012). Classical, Christian education, with its grounding in history, can help students understand this struggle within its wider context in the human experience. He concludes that sport is a formative assessment tool that measures not only the victory but the process. In order to achieve this process, Izzo noted that huge emotional outpourings in the event of a great win or loss should be contained.

Classical education seeks to develop internal motivation within students. This can be enhanced through a sport program. Ntoumanis and Standage (2009) conducted a study to see if the self-determination theory can predict sportsmanship and morality in sport. The self-determination theory looks at a variety of cognitive and behavioral outcomes to compare internal and external motivations in sport. The subjects in this study met certain

criteria to participate. There were 314 athletes in the study (170 males, 144 females) that ranged in age from 18 to 25 years ( $M = 19.67$ ;  $SD = 1.59$ ), while participating in both individual and team sports. The participants had played their chosen sport for an average of six years ( $M = 5.82$  years;  $SD = 4.30$ ), and the competition level ranged from university to international. Each subject was given a questionnaire that evaluated six different items. Those items were autonomy, motivation, sportspersonship, competence, relatedness, and antisocial moral attitudes. The study found that self-ruling incentives, or internal motivation, was a positive predictor of sportsmanship, and it also showed a decline in antisocial attitudes. Also, controlled motivation, or external, showed the reverse. It would positively impact anti-social attitudes while simultaneously lower sportsmanship. These findings show that athletes who are motivated intrinsically to compete for enjoyment or a feeling of accomplishment did not feel a need or desire to cheat or bend the rules to win. However, those athletes that were motivated by external fear of punishment or embarrassment by an outside source or had a strong desire for an extrinsic reward were more inclined to break the fair play rules of competition (Ntoumanis & Standage). This research shows how intrinsic values like fair play, worthy competition, excellence, wisdom, and the pursuit of beauty can transcend the normal tendencies to “cheat” if taught in the classroom and in the realm of sports. These are all values emphasized in classical, Christian education.

In an essay about sports ethics and coaching, Hardman, Jones and Jones (2010) state that “exercising qualities such as speed, endurance and technique, without the cultivation and exhibition of particular virtues, or qualities of moral character such as perseverance, patience, magnanimity in victory and grace in defeat, is to fall considerably

short of achieving fully the standards of sporting excellence. Similarly, purely instrumental actions aimed primarily at winning, (such as those associated with the deliberate professional foul) may be technically and tactically skillful, but lack the exhibition of requisite virtues (particularly those of honesty and fairness) required for achieving the internal goods.” Cultivating the heart, soul, spirit, and mind is a chief aim of classical education, and this article argues that sports can help in achieving this goal. They also believe coaches play a major role in guiding the morals of the team.

In classical education, an important component is the study of the classics. Ancient Greece and Rome and classic literature are a few of the components of a classical curriculum (Simmons, 2002). One such piece of literature is Plato’s *Republic*. Written around 380 B.C., this piece discusses the justice, as well as the character, of government and man. Reid (2007) examines the idea of sport building morality and character through Plato’s *Republic*. Part of the education of the guardians in that time was something called *gymnastike*, which means physical training. However, the goal of this training was not merely physical. The intentions were that of excellence and virtue, which Plato believed to be a characteristic of the mind and soul. Plato believed that God gave the arts and competition not to be at odds with one another but to live in harmony together. Socrates regarded that a “good” body was a direct symptom of virtue of the soul (Reid). These ancient philosophers accepted that training the mind, body, and soul complemented each other, and therefore characteristics like morality and virtue could be taught through physical competition. Classical education gives students a context for understanding sport and gives both students and teachers a vocabulary for talking about developing virtues through sport.

As previously mentioned, classical, Christian education focuses on the pursuit of wisdom, truth, love for God, and beauty. Because of these noble pursuits, athletics may be seen as a hindrance to achieving this purpose. Athletics can be known to encourage “winning at all costs,” cheating, or foul play (Eitzen, 1996). Eitzen (1996) mentions the ethical dilemma sports can present by creating the mindset that winning is the most important thing. This idea can cause classical, Christian schools to pause and consider whether athletics marry well with the central ideas on which their education was founded. The goal of this research paper was to examine whether those virtues conflict or are reinforced in athletics in classical, Christian school.

In an essay on the beauty of sport, Kupfer (1975) describes the idea that competition is not an end, but rather the means to achieve that end that show true beauty. To mirror the thoughts and values of the Greeks, he believes that the pursuit of excellence at an activity that a person loves is what makes sport good and worthwhile. Not only is the physical form working in harmony aesthetically pleasing, but the ideals that materialize between human interaction in competition show balance and unity (Kupfer). In another essay on virtue in sport, Zowislo (2009) discussed how sport in ancient Greece had long-lasting education implications in the life of an athlete. He mentioned that sport was used as a means to shape the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual tenets of a man, and that current sport culture has been sidetracked by drug abuse and commercialism. He argued that society needed to reestablish their ancient roots in sport in order to reclaim the virtue (Zowislo).

## **Conclusion**

Many of the writings and research mentioned above highlight the positive impact sports have on the life of a secondary student-athlete. Those impacts are found to be long-lasting, and they overlap with similar virtues emphasized in classical, Christian education. Competition, unity, and the pursuit of excellence are all character traits that classical, Christian educators value. Virtue in sport dates back to ancient Greece, which is also where classical, Christian education finds its roots. While sport in secondary education is not a newly researched topic, the impact of sport in classical, Christian education is new. Even though it is relatively uncharted, the evidence supporting the benefits of sports is uniquely connected to the benefits of classical, Christian education.

## **CHAPTER THREE: Methodology**

### **Methodology**

In this chapter, the methodology will be detailed. Grounded theory was the chosen method, and the data was gathered through an online, anonymous survey. This method was chosen because of the ability to reach graduates of classical, Christian schools all over the country and not one specific geographical area. It also allowed for this subset of the educational culture to be studied with an objective, open-mind to evaluate whether important characteristics of the academic side of classical, Christian education carry over into the athletic arena. Classical education has seen a resurgence in modern education in the last 25-30 years. There was an essay written by Dorothy Sayers in the 1940s called “The Lost Tools of Learning” that caused educators to pause and consider if they were leading students in the right way. In 1980, parents in three states decided to start schools founded and rooted in the classical model of education and the Sayers’ essay. Because this is a relatively new movement, schools are scattered sporadically throughout the country (see Appendix D), and this study sought to investigate the effects sports had on the classical education experience.

### **Study Design**

Fifty athletic directors were contacted via email and asked to share an online survey with the alumni of their programs. An athletic director (AD) at a classical school in Texas was compiling a list of AD’s at classical, Christian schools across the country, and he agreed to share the contact information so correspondence could happen directly via email. Once the survey was shared with graduates of classical, Christian schools, everything was anonymous, therefore there was no way of determining from what

schools the responses originated. Over 20 of these athletic directors agreed to aid in the research by sending out the online survey to alumni from their school who also participated in at least one team sport. The following are the states from where the 20 AD's responses originated: Alabama, Texas, Tennessee, New York, New Jersey, Virginia, Washington, Missouri, Maryland, Indiana, and Montana. This pool of potential respondents represents roughly 10% of the member body population of the ACCS.

A qualitative, grounded theory approach was chosen because it best suited the topic to be analyzed. Grounded theory was the best choice because it addresses “the overall questions of how and why a process is happening, focusing on that process through an experience or description and interpretation of a phenomena, and using a specific participant sample. But it is not so restricted as to have some generalization capabilities and it better combines data and literature into a theory to explain and understand a process, which is not the focal point of the other designs” (Glogowski, 2017). It is “less appropriate, for example, to use grounded theory when [one] seek[s] to make knowledge claims about an objective reality, and more appropriate to do so when [one] want[s] to make knowledge claims about how individuals interpret reality” (Suddaby, 2006). The questions from this survey were asked to see how alumni from classical, Christian schools interpreted their reality of playing sports in a classical, Christian environment. Grounded theory is a method of expanding or developing a theory based on observations or data collected and analyzed (Noble & Mitchell, 2016). Once the contact information was gained from the athletic directors at classical, Christian schools all over the country, an anonymous survey with open-ended questions was the chosen

method because a larger group of alumni spanning a wider geographical range could be polled.

The approach to the research was meant to give graduates of classical, Christian schools a chance to reflect on their athletic experience in high school in comparison to their academic requirements and expectations. The questions were designed to give each respondent the opportunity to answer positively or negatively about their experience in sport. The questions were also asked to help the athletes to think about whether the values emphasized in academics in classical, Christian education translated onto the playing field or court. Each question was constructed so that there would be minimal misinterpretation of the meaning. While everyone's experience might have been different, the questions were meant to be uniform in their interpretation. The questions were specific to their experience in athletics in classical, Christian education. Specific questions have less a chance to be misconstrued by the reader (Converse & Presser, 1986). The demographic questions were meant to limit the respondents to former student-athletes that graduated from classical, Christian schools, and the mnemonic questions were meant to link the respondents back to specific memories in their athletic experience. This has been proven a better way to recall events from the past (Gobo & Mauceri, 2014). As previously mentioned, research shows that sport can provide many benefits to secondary students, but are virtues like wisdom and truth and beauty also ingrained into the fabric of the athletic department at these schools? This research was designed to get feedback from student-athlete graduates of classical, Christian schools to evaluate whether those virtues taught in the classroom carried over onto the field or court.

### **Sample and Data Collection**

A timeline of two weeks was given for the survey (See Appendix A) to be emailed and filled out before analyzing the responses. The knowledge of how many surveys were emailed is unknown because the athletic directors did not indicate an exact number of alumni to be emailed. Twenty-three athletic directors at classical, Christian schools across the county responded saying they would forward the survey on to their alumni. There were 47 total surveys completed after the two-week window.

The questions were designed to be either completely open-ended/free response questions or give multiple choice options that covered differing opinions on the topic. An attempt was made to ensure that everyone who filled out the survey was in fact a graduate of a classical, Christian school and played at least one team sport, however there was no way to check because the survey was anonymous. The first two questions of the survey asked if they were a graduate of a classical, Christian school and if they played at least one team sport. They had to answer “yes” to each question to move on to the rest of the survey.

The qualitative data was analyzed through the following methods. First, all of the written responses were read through and the questions were revisited to compare with the responses. Second, similar and overlapping information was organized into various categories based on each individual question looking for items repeated frequently, items that may have been expected but omitted, and finally items that were significant to a specific response and to the study. Third, these repeated answers were labeled as themes. Once the themes were discovered, the goal was to identify any patterns in the themes as they occurred (LeCompte, 2000).

## **CHAPTER FOUR: Results**

### **Results from Survey**

The findings were overwhelmingly positive, and many responses showed the unique place sport has in classical, Christian education. As previously mentioned, the first question asked if the participant was between the ages of 18-35. A “yes” response was required before moving on to the next question which asked if they participated in at least one sport in a classical, Christian high school. Another “yes” response was required to move on to the rest of the survey. There were 100% “yes” responses to both of these questions from all of the participants.

The goal of the survey questions was to have the graduates think about their overall experience in a classical, Christian school and to compare/contrast their time spent in the classroom versus their time spent on the court or playing field. The goal of each question was to either detail their experience academically, athletically, or find common threads (if any) between the two. The questions were also numbered in such a way that each respondent moved from concrete, objective answers (“yes, we were taught that” or “no we were not”) to more subjective, thought-provoking responses such as how influential a coach was or how academic virtues were displayed in athletics. Questions seven, eight, nine, and ten on the survey were asked in hopes that after thinking about their academic and athletic endeavors separately, each respondent would have an opportunity to find the positive and/or negative impacts sports had in a classical, Christian school. The thought was that if those values taught in the classroom were in fact

reinforced in sports, then it would show up in the responses to these questions. The responses were strongly in favor of those values taught in both arenas.

For question seven, the respondents were asked to recall whether a coach influenced their lives in a positive or negative way. This question was included to see whether coaches at classical, Christian schools teach and model the same values in the classroom. Most of the respondents answered positively, giving specific stories about times when they wanted to quit but a coach influenced them to persevere. They mentioned how coaches sacrificed for the team, and how they always pointed them back to Jesus. Two equal themes were the idea of dedication and motivation. Many athletes felt as though coaches “demonstrated the importance of giving 100% effort even when there is nothing in return for oneself.” Another theme was how coaches spent time outside of practice speaking words of life and encouragement into the hearts of the respondents. One response said “one basketball coach that I had for four years total was very influential in teaching me and our team how to live godly lives and apply the same principles of work ethic and attitude used in basketball to every aspect of our life. He used many quotes and Bible verses to encourage our team to improve both in basketball and spiritually.” There were also a couple respondents that had negative experiences with coaches pushing them to a breaking point or manipulating the situation by favoring a player. “We had a coach yell at us and push us to our limit. While this might have been beneficial to some in order to work hard, for others like myself this only added more pressure and stress, which sometimes led to feelings of exhaustion and possible injury,” wrote one athlete. Even though exhaustion and injury are natural responses in athletics,

the majority of responses focused on how coaches motivated them to work hard and pursue excellence.

For question eight, the respondents were asked if participating in sports positively or adversely affected their academic experience. This question was asked to further engage the conversation regarding the classical education academic experience and playing sports. Eleven participants (23%) stated that either sports negatively affected their academic performance, or it was neutral. A common theme from the negative responses stated time away from studies or exhaustion as being reasons for the negative effects. One answer said “probably adversely since it took up some of your free time or you were tired from practice.” Thirty-six (77%) of the respondents felt like playing sports had a positive effect on their classical education. An interesting response given for this question was “while practices took away time from studying and/or sleep, the exercise from participating in the track and field events made me to feel healthy, and helped combat the negative feelings I had about my body at that age.” A recurring theme among the ones who answered positively was that of discipline and time management. One respondent said “it positively affected my academics because I learned the value of discipline and hard work, and I applied this to my academic work.” Finally, the theme of glorifying the Lord surfaced, and one response said “I believe that they positively affected my academics by giving me an outlet for my energy and stress. Also, athletics reinforced the idea of ‘doing all for the glory of God’ which was extremely influential in how I approached my work by the end of high school.”

Question nine asked the respondents to consider whether the values taught in academics were similar or different from the values taught in athletics. As mentioned

previously, classical education emphasizes wisdom, truth, and beauty. The classical educator seeks to follow the Latin phrase *multum, non multa* meaning much, not many. They dive deeply into subjects to achieve mastery rather than skimming the surface of a wide variety of offerings. The researcher wanted to give alumni an opportunity to consider whether any of these virtues are developed or emphasized through athletics. Seven participants (15%) felt that the values taught were different, while 40 participants (85%) said it was similar. One response said “in an academic setting, I was urged to pursue truth, goodness, and beauty. While these values were not explicitly urged on the athletic fields, they governed my participation.” Hard work, teamwork, Christo centricity, discipline, and commitment were also common themes among many of the answers. “The values between the two are similar because the goal of both is to pursue mastery and understanding through everything that you do. Just as I applied myself in my classes through my learning and practice, I used those same skills on my sports teams to learn new methods and practice them continuously,” reflected one person. Another respondent said “because a classical, Christian education seeks to shape a whole person, the values remain the same throughout the different methods of forming. The values of excellence, hard work, critical thinking, and virtue all to God's glory are essential to both athletics and academics in a classical, Christian education. The difference may be that teamwork and good sportsmanship are particular to athletics.”

In the final question, the respondents were asked to reflect on any lasting effects, positive or negative, from time spent in the athletic program. Forty-three respondents (91.5%) named many lasting positive effects, and four respondents (8.5%) either said not applicable or listed some negative effects. From the positive responses, common themes

were of the respondents missing their teams, learning to glorify God in every situation, developing healthy habits, and learning how to work as a team through honesty, integrity and sportsmanship. One person said “family is the lasting affect. I know that most schools will say their team was so close, but our team was closer. We had small class sizes, so we knew most of our teammates from kindergarten through graduation. We all grew up together. We were family. I always say I wish I could go back and play with them for another year. I miss how close we were and always having someone next to you who knew all of your struggles, as well as victories. I miss being with my teammates every day.” The negative effects listed were mostly linked to an injury.

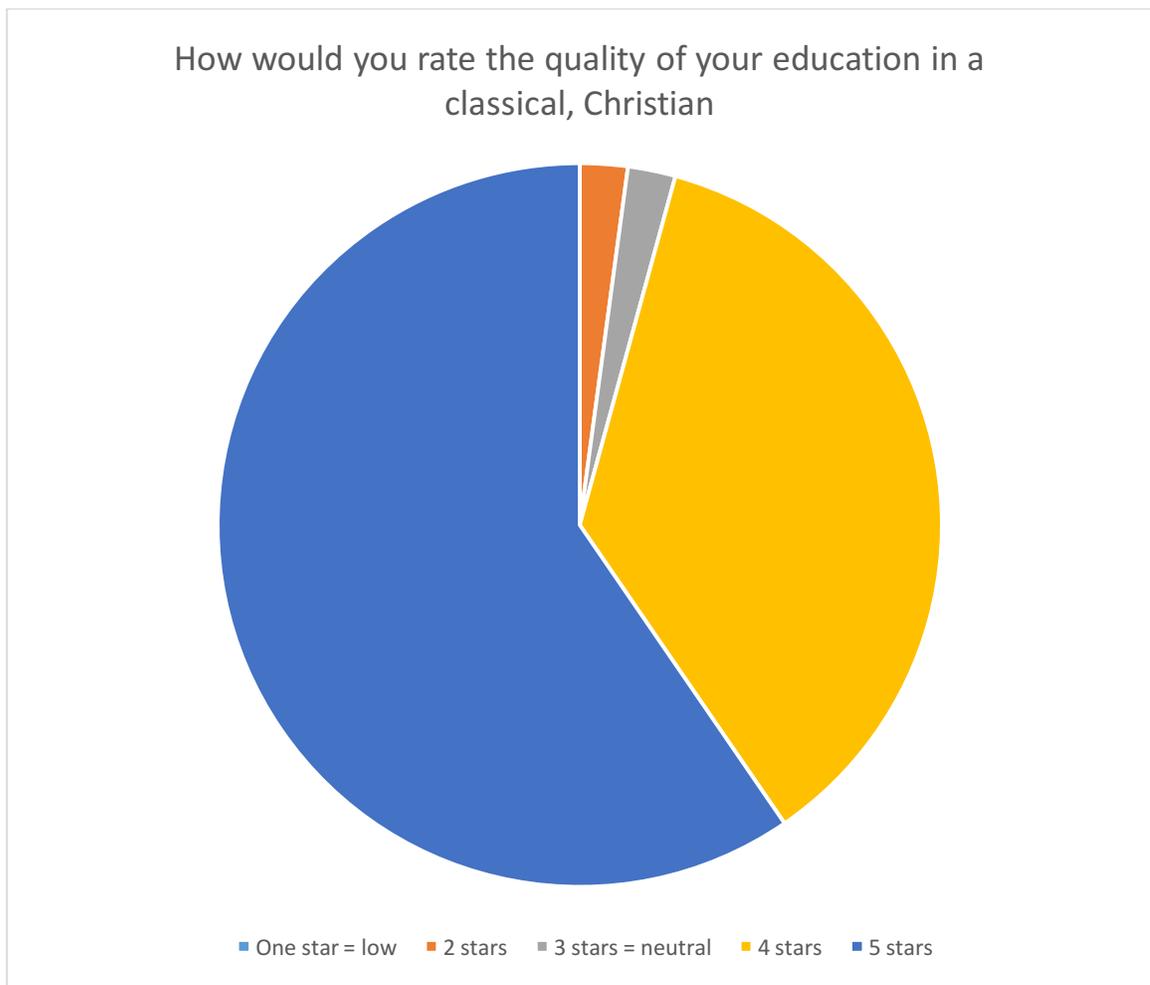
The fourth and fifth questions were free response questions addressing the pursuit of excellence in academics and athletics. The questions asked if they were taught to pursue excellence in academics and athletics and asked them to expound. The purpose of the questions was to get the respondents thinking about excellence in the classroom and excellence in the athletic arena separately, so then, as mentioned previously, they could further expound on these responses later. For the academic question, over 80% of the responses gave an emphatic “yes we were taught to pursue excellence,” with many describing how teachers pushed them to high levels of expectation. One respondent mentioned being “shown what excellence looked like.” Academics was seen as “joyful discovery” as a way to “glorify God.” A major theme in question four was that the goal of academics was the pursuit of wisdom, beauty, and truth which encouraged the pursuit of excellence. A second theme was that excellence stemmed from living a life to glorify God. A third theme was how difficult assignments, debates, questions, and mastery of skills and knowledge were all factors in developing an attitude of merit in their academic

environment. There were several interesting responses to this question including how people felt like high academic performance was expressly discouraged, but rather that they were encouraged to pursue wisdom and knowledge. These responses correlated to the answers in the question about pursuit of excellence in athletics.

A major theme that emerged from the question regarding athletics was people felt like coaches pushed them beyond natural ability and encouraged them to show more. Coaches were mentioned as encouraging athletes to “leave it all on the field” and “play to the best of their ability” and “keep a level head.” Enthusiastic coaches taught many of the participants to work hard to achieve a goal and overcome adversity. While there were a couple responses that said they did not feel like they were pushed hard or taught to pursue excellence in athletics, the large majority felt the opposite. Teamwork was a second common theme that developed in this question; that it was not about the individual pursuits, but rather what they could achieve together. One coach even ended his practice with everyone saying “Non Nobis,” meaning not to us. A third theme was that of the pursuit of excellence in sports as a way of glorifying God. This paralleled many of the respondents’ take on academics as well. There were a couple responses that said they were taught to “do their best” but not explicitly told to pursue excellence, while a few others felt like their sports were not hyper competitive. This may tie into the size of the school and how competitive sports can be at a small level.

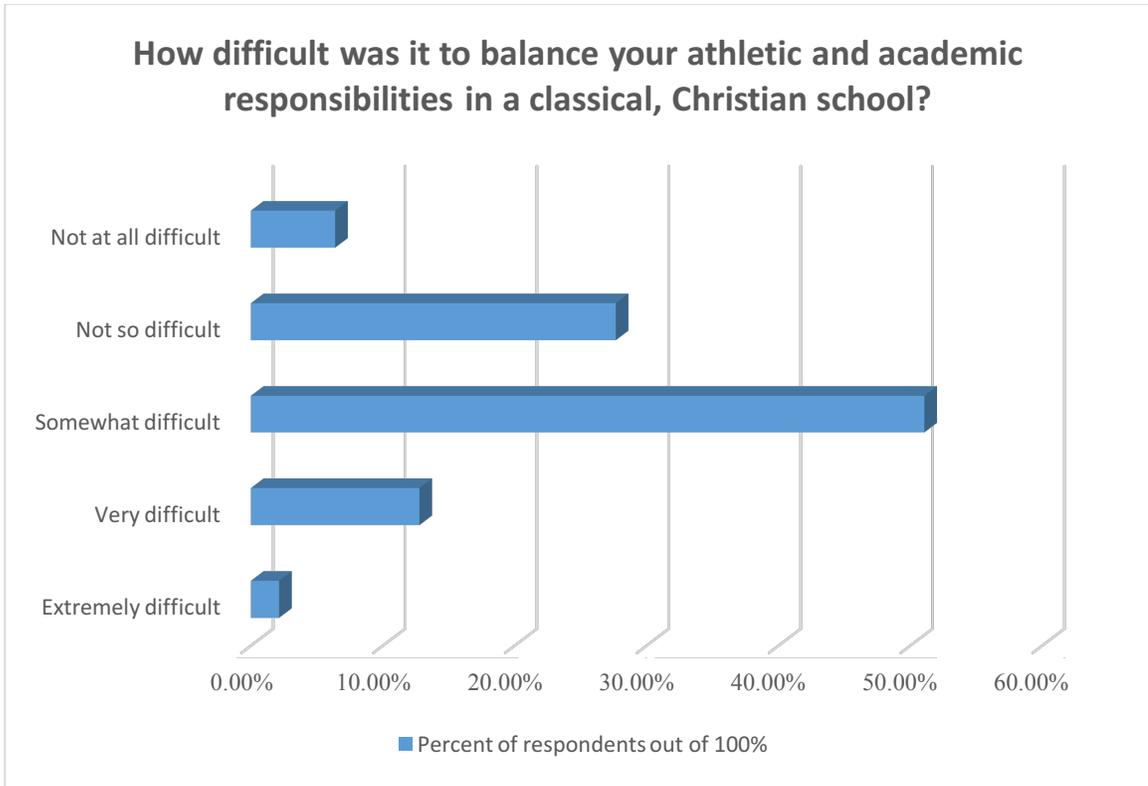
Questions three and six were asked to gauge the respondents’ views on the quality and rigor of their academic schedule. The purpose of these questions was to discover if sports were “easy” to participate in because school was not difficult, or if despite a rigorous academic schedule, the students still found joy and virtue in athletics. The third

question in the survey asked the participants to rate the quality of their education at a classical, Christian school on a 5-point scale (See Appendix B). This question was asked to gauge how the graduates felt about their overall academic experience at a classical, Christian school. One participant (2.13%) felt middle-low, while another participant (2.13%) felt neutral, seventeen participants (36.17%) answered middle-high or a “4”, and 28 participants (59.57%) rated the quality of their education high.



Question six asked the respondents to rate the difficulty level of balancing academics and athletics at a classical, Christian school on a five-point scale (see Appendix C). One (2.13%) rated it extremely difficult, while six (12.77%) said very difficult. The majority of respondents, 24 (51.06%), felt it was somewhat difficult to

balance academics and athletics. Thirteen (27.66%) said it was not so difficult, and finally, three (6.38%) felt it was not difficult at all.



### Conclusion

Many people involved in classical, Christian education understand that speaking with truth, appreciating beauty, and walking in wisdom are goals for all who are educated through this avenue. Those values are taught in the curriculum and emphasized in faculty trainings. The hope is that as students progress into high school and beyond, that transcendence occurs, where the students act and speak out of wisdom, truth, and beauty as a part of their internal nature. Are these ideas taught in sports? The answer is yes. This study reinforces results from previous studies about athletics and secondary education, and more importantly, it shows how classical, Christian education is uniquely suited to enhancing these benefits through character development. The researcher believes this

study shows a strong correlation between these values and the student-athlete at a classical, Christian school. A strong theme that was reoccurring in many responses to the survey was the idea of work, in the classroom or on the field, as an opportunity to bring glory to God. Another theme that emerged was the pursuit of wisdom, beauty, and truth. Other themes emphasized teamwork, hard work, and integrity. The answers from the respondents previously mentioned show they felt like coaches and the sport experience further ingrained these values in their hearts and minds. Sports have a way of bringing out the best or worst in humanity, and classical, Christian education has a unique opportunity to show that sports not only train the physical and mental body in preparation for competition, but sports can challenge the heart and soul. Competition is a means of “striving together” as its Latin root suggests, and that should be the goal of athletics in classical, Christian education. Athletes working together to achieve a purpose of making themselves and their teammates better and also raising the level of competition against their opponents.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: Discussion and Further Study**

### **Discussion and Reflections**

In the previous chapter, there were several strong points made to reinforce the idea that sports add value to the philosophy behind classical, Christian education. While it has been argued that wisdom, truth, and beauty can be seen and experienced and taught on the athletic field or court, one virtue not mentioned in the responses in this study is humility. Humility is a character trait that encompasses the idea that others should be put before oneself. This is the essence of the Christian life as mentioned in John 3:30 that Christians “must become less” (Society & International, 2007). Even though this idea is not specifically labeled in this research, playing team sports is one of the best avenues to learn humility because the athlete is constantly seeking to put the needs of the team above her own, and she must seek to be humble when victorious and also gracious in defeat (Austin, 2014).

### **Limitations of Study**

There were a few limitations to this study. There were geographic constraints on the research considering that there were not many classical, Christian schools close to the researcher. She was forced to communicate with school athletic directors and administrators via email or phone. The anonymous survey also limited the ability to further continue the discussion when an interesting point was made.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Classical, Christian education has resurfaced over the recent years, so there is very little current research about how the movement is impacting their students. One recommendation for further study is to conduct personal interviews with athletic directors

and headmasters at classical, Christian schools to inquire about how they are infusing these classical virtues into the hearts of their athletic programs. It is easy for athletics to take on a life of its own in a school, which may be a reason why classical, Christian schools are hesitant to grow their athletic programs. There is a temptation to attract families with strong athletic abilities, but they do not believe in the mission of classical, Christian education. This may provide good short-term success but can have detrimental long-term effects because a school may lose sight of their foundational virtues. This study shows that the athletic experience is enhanced by virtues, and that administrators at classical, Christian schools should not trade their values for a winning season. The mere fact that these graduates from this study can remember in detail how sports positively affected their experience and complemented their academics in a classical, Christian school shows the importance of sports in these schools. Values-driven athletics can help graduates create a memorable high school experience and may incite them to want to invest and support the school in the future. Administrators and/or board members at these schools should create an athletic handbook that details the school's philosophy of how sports are integrated into the life of the school. It would also be an important step to ensure all coaches are on board with this philosophy and create a training session for coaches on how they can incorporate these values into the life of the athletic program. Another interesting study would be to choose a younger demographic. Gathering information from middle and/or high school students currently attending classical, Christian schools may highlight some positive areas or areas that need improvement in the athletic department.

### **Conclusion**

This study sought to answer the question of whether sports reinforce the values taught in the classroom in classical, Christian education. Classical, Christian education values the pursuit of wisdom, truth, beauty, and a genuine love for learning centered on the idea that all of creation reflects the nature of God. Questions were asked to graduates of various classical, Christian schools across the country to give them an opportunity to evaluate whether these trademark characteristics translated onto a field or court of play. When asked about whether these values were emphasized in the sporting arena, over 80% of the respondents confirmed that sports did in fact reinforce the ideals that are bedrock to classical, Christian education. When asked about whether coaches demonstrated this type of behavior, again over 80% of the respondents said that their coaches influenced their lives in a positive manner and found many ways to point the athletes back to God. In conclusion, this study affirms that sports play an integral role in teaching the whole child in classical, Christian education. Wisdom, the pursuit of excellence, truth, and beauty were highlighted not only in the classroom in classical, Christian education but also outside of the classroom in the arena of sports. This research indicates that participation in sports in classical, Christian schools is not only congruent with mission of classical, Christian education, but, in many situations, it is a physical manifestation of the values that are held so dear. As mentioned previously, competition is a “striving together,” and educators, administrators, and coaches in this realm have a unique opportunity to make connections between the moral and educational standards that overlap in the classroom and sports. In a liturgy for “Those Who Compete,” from Every Moment Holy, the prayer states “Let me never love winning more than I love those against whom I compete. Let me care for coaches, teammates, opponents, and spectators, remembering that, while the

stakes of this game are only temporary, the people around me are eternal” (McKelvey, 2017). This prayer embodies what classical, Christian educators can emphasize in every area of their school, particularly in sports.

Juan Antonio Samaranch once explained *our philosophy precedes from the belief that sport is an inalienable part of the educational process and a factor for promoting peace, friendship, cooperation, and understanding among peoples*. While no activity is perfect or incorruptible, this research displays that many positive characteristics can be attained through sport. In classical, Christian education, teaching the whole (mind, body, spirit) child is a goal. A person cannot separate the body from the mind nor the mind from the body. This study sought to discover whether playing team sports in classical, Christian education reinforced the values that are central to this type of education. The responses from this research indicate sports can play a crucial role in the development of positive life-long habits of not just activity, but integrity, hard work, pursuit of excellence, and an appreciation for the beauty and order in God’s created world. While there will always be an exception to every rule, the phoenix who rises from the ashes of his life to become something extraordinary (or in this case the child who develops as a “whole” person despite not having a range of athletic and academic choices), as this research implies, it is imperative for classical, Christian educators to offer a variety of sports in order to truly educate the whole child and model the essence of classical, Christian education in all walks of life (Ball, Bice, & Parry, 2016; Camire & Kendellen, 2015; Nicoleta, 2014; Schmid, 2012). Sports are an “inalienable part of the educational process,” and they not only promote “peace, friendship, cooperation, and understanding among peoples” but also wisdom, truth, pursuit of excellence, and beauty.

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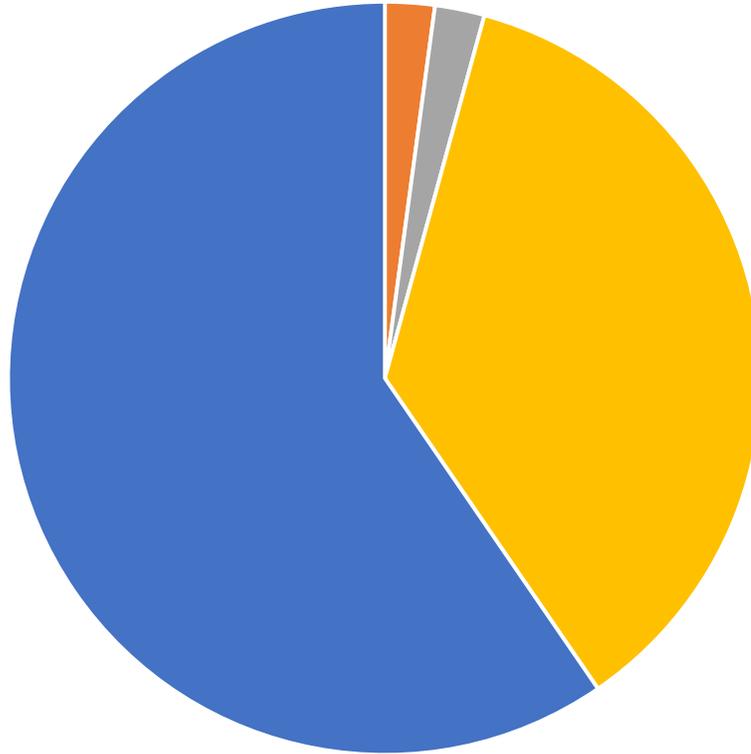
## APPENDIX A

### Survey questions

1. Are you between the ages of 18 and 35?  
(answering yes is the only option, and they have to answer the question for the next one to be revealed)
2. Did you participate in at least one sport while attending a classical, Christian high school?  
(answering yes is the only option, and they have to answer the question for the next one to be revealed)
3. How would you rate the quality of your education in a classical, Christian school?  
(this is a 5-star rating question with one star being low and 5 stars being high)
4. Were you taught to pursue excellence in academics? If so, how?  
(this is a free-response question)
5. Were you taught to pursue excellence in athletics? If so, how?  
(this is a free response question)
6. How difficult was it to balance your athletic and academic responsibilities in a classical, Christian school?  
(this is a multiple choice question ranging from extremely difficult to not difficult at all)
7. Was a coach influential in your life in a positive and/or negative way? Please describe.  
(this is a free response question)
8. Did your participation in sports adversely affect or positively affect your academics? Please describe.  
(this is a free response question)
9. Are the values taught through academics similar to or different from the values taught through athletics in a classical, Christian school? Please describe.  
(this is a free response question)
10. As a graduate of a classical, Christian school, are there any lasting effects (positive or negative) from your time spent in the athletic program?  
(this is a free response question)

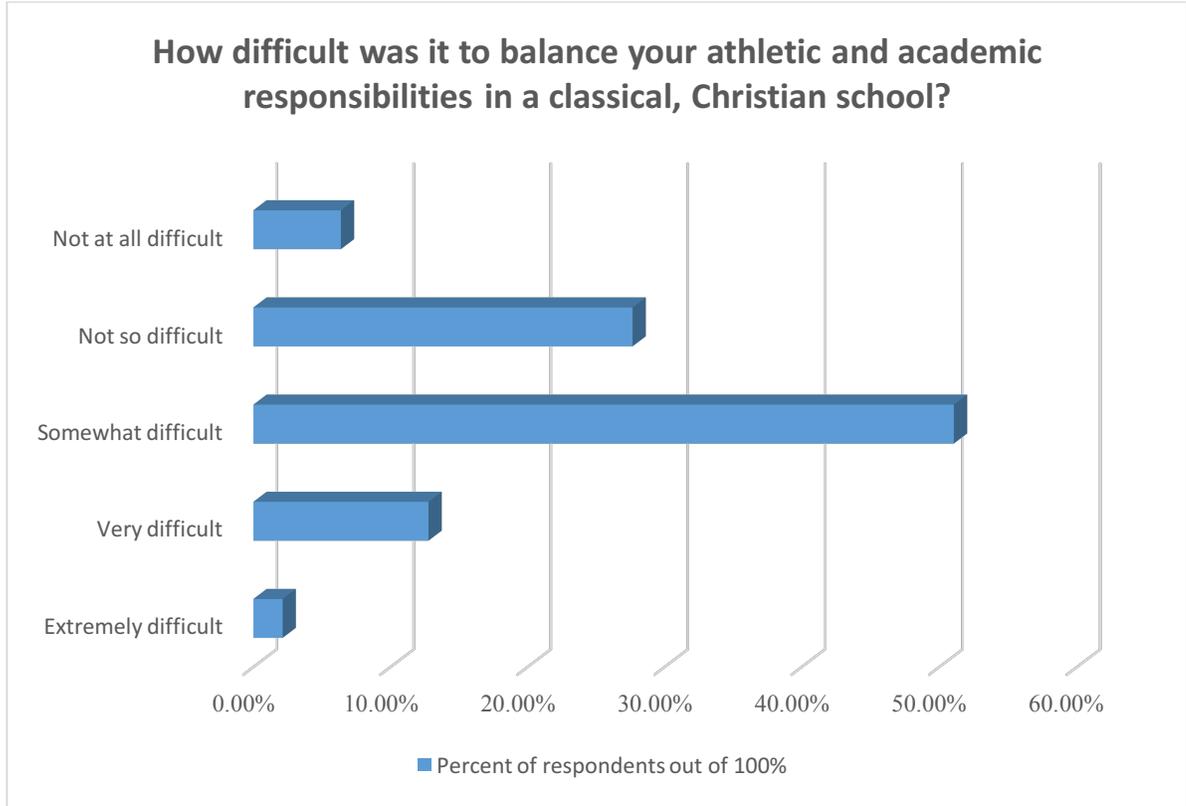
**APPENDIX B**

How would you rate the quality of your education in a classical, Christian



■ One star = low ■ 2 stars ■ 3 stars = neutral ■ 4 stars ■ 5 stars

## APPENDIX C



## **APPENDIX D**

Below is a link that contains a map locating classical, Christian schools across the country that are members of ACCS (“Find a School,” 2017). There could be more classical, Christian schools that are not registered with the ACCS.

<https://classicalchristian.org/find-a-school/>