

## **Religious Reflections in Sport: With Special Reference to Buddhism and Olympic Values**

D. L. I. H. K. Peiris

Department of Sport Science and Physical Education, University of Kelaniya

Early sport festivals began with ancient religious beliefs and people have blended religion and sport into their belief systems throughout the history. It is common among athletes to gather in circles to offer prayers before the commencement of a game. Players often rely on their religious beliefs for hopes of success. Today, as Jona and Oku (2013) point out, both mega sport events such as the Olympics and religion are used as essential tools to promote development, unity and peaceful co-existence in the society. Though there is an increasing number of research studies that explore the relationship between sport and religion with reference to Christianity and Islam, there is a less focus on the of Buddhism and sport. To address that gap, the present illustrative case study focuses on religious reflection in sport, with special reference to Buddhism and Olympic values. The Olympic values of “striving for excellence”, “Demonstrating respect” and “Celebrating friendship” are aimed at encouraging people to get on better and thus promote peace. These values are also reflected in Buddhist teachings as evident in Ariya Attangika Magga, Adhipathi Dhamma, Loka Palaka Dhamma, Dhamma Pada and Singalowada Sutta. This study draws exclusively on observations, with the secondary data consisting of Sinhala translations of the *Tripitka*, documents and archival records. The results of this study suggest that several aspects of Buddhism are mirrored in Olympic values. In addition, the study revealed that there is a conflict between the current sport practice and the Olympic values even though religions including Buddhism reflect such values. For example, athletes with well-defined religious values frequently draw the line at certain behaviours they believe inappropriate. Through these findings, it is apparent that as the Olympic values had applied the tenets of a worthy spiritual life to sports which is also discussed in Buddhism, participants can feel a powerful spiritual endorsement for what otherwise may seem a self-indulgent pastime.

**Key Words:** Buddhism, Olympic Values, Religious Reflections, Sports.