

Crabs and Crowns

The Catholic Review

Bagels and Tastycakes. Likely the one and only time these words will ever appear together in a column of mine, these staples of households in New York and Philadelphia were on the line recently as Archbishop Timothy Dolan and Cardinal Justin Rigali placed a friendly wager on who would win the 2009 World Series.

As I read about the bet between Archbishops (and long-time friends), I couldn't help but wonder when I might have that chance to show my "new colors." Though I've never attempted to hide my devotion to the hometown teams of my youth—as much a birthright as my Irish ancestry—I have come to follow the Orioles and Ravens over the course of my years in Baltimore. And like many of the loyal fans here—especially those long-suffering ones who bleed black and orange— I can't help but wonder when that time will come.

The article about the wager also prompted me to consider the link between our Catholic faith and sports.

That was a subject being discussed at the Vatican last weekend as the Pontifical Council for the Laity hosted a seminar titled, "Sport, Education, Faith: Toward a New Season for Catholic Sport Associations." The goal of the gathering was to examine how sports can develop people both physically and spiritually.

Our late Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, was himself an avid sportsman (I can still picture him hiking and skiing) and created a sports department in the Vatican in hopes that it would provide a new means for evangelization. And Pope Benedict XVI has made several public statements about the benefits of sports, saying they "contribute to building a society characterized by mutual respect, loyalty of behavior, and solidarity between peoples and cultures."

Such solidarity can certainly be seen between cities and their fans and this is no less true here in our Archdiocese. Fan loyalties, though, are as diverse as the geography marking the boundaries of our local Church: a Sunday visit to the parishes of far

Western Maryland reveals support for Pittsburgh teams like the Steelers, while parishioners in parts of Howard or Frederick Counties might cheer for the Redskins. Much of the rest of the Archdiocese is united as much in their disdain for both of these dreaded rivals as they are in their love for the Ravens.

Not just for the professionals, the lessons and benefits of sports can be found at all levels. Just visit any Catholic school athletic field during the week or even on a Saturday or Sunday when CYO games are played. The fraternal bonds enjoyed by those playing, as well as their fans, are just as deep and impressive as anything seen at Camden Yards.

Speaking of stadiums, I understand that a Baltimore sports tradition since 1918 continues this Thanksgiving at M&T Bank Stadium when Calvert Hall and Loyola's football teams meet. This is the one day of the year when the eyes of local sports fans are on two Catholic school teams. It is a wonderful tradition and a great day for students, families and alumni of these two Catholic schools.

Hopefully the day will come soon when the stakes will be just as high for the Orioles or Ravens as the bragging rights are for the Cardinals and Dons. Whenever that day comes, I'll be ready to put my loyalties on the line with a bushel of steamed crabs...though my only regret will be not being able to welcome Yankee bagels, should the bet be on the Orioles to win the World Series!