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Sports Ministry as an Entryway into North Korea As a Means of Spreading the Gospel

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Sports Ministry as an Entryway into North Korea
As a Means of Spreading the Gospel

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For Dr. Gordon Miller

In fulfillment of the Southeastern University Honors Thesis Requirement

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Kim Jong Un, the leader of North Korea, is a huge fan of basketball. A student named Joao Micaelo claims he went to school in Switzerland with Kim Jong Un and that they were good friends. Micaelo testifies that young Kim Jong Un had a passion for basketball and was rather talented at playing the sport. He claims that “[Kim Jong Un] played basketball; he had basketball games on his PlayStation. The whole world for him was just basketball all the time” (Shubert 13). Supposedly, he was a Michael Jordan fan and frequently wore Michael Jordan basketball shoes. So in February 2013, *CNN* reported that when former Chicago Bulls NBA basketball player Dennis Rodman visited North Korea for the first time, he and Kim Jong Un quickly befriended each other through the same interest in basketball. Vice Media correspondent Ryan Duffy brought Moose Weekes, Buckets Blakes, and Bull Bullard from the Harlem Globetrotters team and Dennis Rodman to North Korea and obtained first-hand information of the visit (VICE Media). Rodman’s most recent trip was made in January 2014 when he and Vice Media organized an exhibition game between a team of basketball stars from the United States and the North Korean professional basketball team. They played on the eighth of January for Kim Jong Un’s birthday, and Dennis Rodman even sang “Happy Birthday” to him. The U.S. basketball stars were able to practice with the North Korean team, and they even were allowed to make stops in Pyongyang at a park to teach some kids how to play basketball (VICE Media). It is believed that Rodman’s intentions in North Korea were to create an opportunity for cultural exchange through basketball diplomacy between the U.S. and North Korea (“Dennis Rodman Returns after Visit to North Korea”).

New York Times’ Brian Stelter, explained how “Kim Jong Un showed up for the exhibition game in Pyongyang the day before, making Mr. Rodman and Vice’s film crew the

first Americans known to have met the North Korean ruler since he inherited power from his father in 2011” (Stelter 5). What gave Rodman the only access to the North Korean regime leader? Many Americans and Christians criticize Rodman for his involvement in North Korea, but his goal to build a friendship with Kim Jong Un through basketball was ultimately effective. Rodman is simply going into the nation without a hidden agenda but solely on the grounds of basketball. His goals are transparent: he wants to build friendships and play his favorite sport with people of other nations. Rodman understands the power sports have on influencing people of diverse cultures and societies. Sports have been used in international diplomacy to create peace and unity, to spread Christianity, to build relationships, and to promote cooperation between hostile nations. For example, consider the effectiveness of ping pong diplomacy between China and the United States in the 1970s (Hong and Sun) or soccer diplomacy between Iran and the United States in the late 1990s (Chehabi). Cricket has also been a tool of diplomacy between Pakistan and India with the most recent example employed in the World Cup Cricket in 2011 (Usman). These examples provide evidence of how powerful sports are among the nations of the world. Dennis Rodman knew how influential a sport can be and decided to exploit its usefulness. Overall, it is remarkable that Rodman was able to enter the nation’s borders and to have met such a significant leader.

Because Kim Jong Un’s government limits how many people are allowed to cross the threshold of North Korean borders, making the nation enigmatic, it is considered the Hermit Kingdom of the world. North Korea also does not participate in foreign relations because they are wary of colonizing nations such as the United States. Throughout Korea’s history, they have been controlled by powerful nations like Japan, China, Russia, and the United States. While under Japanese rule, their Korean identities were suppressed; therefore, one of the possible

reasons North Korea is so nationalistic and egocentric may be a result of how they have been treated in the past. They are not accepting of any culture, religion, or idea from the “outside” world. As a result, “this communist state tends to seal off its border almost completely and thereby becomes increasingly isolated due to its internal and external political situation against the backdrop of globalization” (Jung Woo Lee and Bairner 391). North Korea is extremely resistant and hostile toward the importation of any kind of system of thought that could lead North Korean nationals to question Kim Jong Un’s leadership, especially religions such as Christianity. Because North Korea does not participate in any foreign exchange, their people do not have sufficient food supplies and are lacking in many other necessities. In order for missionaries to provide aid in these areas of need, they must be accepted by the regime and its leader, Kim Jong Un. Therefore, information should be acquired about the leader in order to discover what he enjoys and would accept, and maybe even enthusiastically invite, into the country.

Christian missionaries have been trying to access North Korea for decades since Kim Il-sung assumed the position of the leader and Father of the nation. Many missionaries have been persecuted and killed in the past for trying to proselytize, and persecution continues today. Undercover Christians and those involved in public efforts to assist the North Korean government with building schools, resolving food shortages, and providing medical aid have been imprisoned for various reasons. Missionaries such as Kenneth Bae have been accused of attempting to overthrow the North Korean government by participating in simple humanitarian acts. Due to these difficulties, it is apparent that conventional methods of introducing Christian thoughts, beliefs, and values are not effective. Sports, however, are a universal language and can defy most cultural animosity, breaking down cultural and political barriers between people of

radically different persuasions. Through extensive research on the history, culture, ideology, and examples of sports ministry, it can be assumed that sports ministry has the ability to be an effective method of building relationships with North Korean nationals, and ultimately, of bringing the Gospel to the entire nation. It would seem to the rest of the world that those within North Korea's borders are a lost cause with little opportunity of being free to think and act on the basis of personal convictions. However, hope can be found in the fact that the leader of North Korea loves basketball and desires to be globally recognized in sports. Sports, particularly sports like basketball, which inspire such passion in Kim Jong Un, provide a logical platform for building relationship with North Korean leaders and triggering change in the communities under their influence.

Because North Korea's past defines their present circumstances and thought processes, it is critical to know their historical background. It is also necessary to understand North Korean culture in order to learn what specific sports appeal to them and will be most effective in engaging the people. Finally, to test the potential effectiveness of sports as a chance in reaching North Korea, the following questions must be addressed:

- What aspects of North Korea's historical background and current political system benefit or encourage foreigners to bring a sports organization into the depths of North Korean society?
- How could sports in North Korea break down cultural barriers of preconceived prejudices against foreigners and Christianity?
- Are there examples of sports ministry working in other cultures that break down barriers, build relationships, and instill Christian values in a nonthreatening way?

A strategy for building relationships with North Koreans through a sports-based outreach must be initiated by discovering the answers to these three questions. This exploration begins by surveying examples of sports used in diplomatic and missional initiatives historically and currently throughout the world.

CHAPTER 2: EXAMPLES OF SPORTS MINISTRY/ DIPLOMACY

Sports ministry that has been enacted in other countries, cultures, and settings provides the proof and evidence that it can work in North Korea as well. Sports have only recently been used as a method for ministry, and it is not publicly known if it has been performed in North Korea. In Slovakia, a former Soviet satellite run by mini-dictators and politically oppressed for much of its history, sports ministry is being effectively implemented. While under communist rule, Slovakia had zero religious tolerance. Even today, Slovakia is wary of theology and is unreceptive toward proselytes (McCracken). In the article, "Jesus Ball in Slovakia," Patti McCracken explains how Johnson, the director of GoodSports International Camp, uses baseball ministry and the language of sports to teach kids valuable lessons, to connect with them, and to introduce them to the unconditional love of Jesus. Johnson is a former baseball player from Minnesota who played for the Twins in the 1970s; however, after an injury, he went to divinity school and soon took leadership of GoodSports International Camp in 2005. After living in the country and all the difficulties that entailed, Johnson said, "And the question early on is: Why am I here? But the reason is relationships. The true value of what you do is about the people you meet and the lives you touch," even though it is a challenging task for Johnson to create relationships with people in a country that have endured so much physical, emotional, and mental oppression under communism (McCracken 49). Johnson uses acts of kindness known to their culture to show unconditional love and reinforcement they may have never experienced before (McCracken).

The lessons that are being taught at GoodSports International Camp include instilling positivity and hope in the students. Johnson inspires the kids and is a mentor to them in a society where they have been controlled by dictators and may have never previously experienced

encouragement. Roman Mozsi is one of the first generation of kids that were in the GoodSports program after World War II when Slovakia was finally able to freely practice Christianity. Mozsi explains,

“‘I joined because of baseball, but I stayed for the stories,’ he says, referring to the Christian teaching and testimonies. But the staff’s unconditional love made the biggest impression. ‘It all got me thinking about God,’ Mozsi says. ‘At the time, I liked to fight. But then it shifted. I no longer felt good after I beat someone up. Instead, I’d worry about them. It was then that I thought there must be a better way’” (McCracken 50).

Mozsi is just one example of many whom have been greatly impacted by Johnson and his GoodSports International Camp program. Johnson’s personal mission on the field is to live by Francis of Assisi’s famous maxim, “Preach the Gospel at all times, and when necessary, use words,” because he is not able to communicate effectively in the Slovakian language and neither are the kids able to speak communicable English. Johnson relies on his actions to declare the unconditional love and grace of Jesus Christ (McCracken).

“The beauty of sports,” Johnson says, “is that in a concentrated period of time you can teach kids so many things, and you can get into their lives in a concentrated way” (McCracken 50). In a culture that has been oppressed throughout its history like Slovakia, it can be difficult to create deep, trusting relationships with the people. However, fortunately through sporting activities, internal barriers tend to be broken down among people in a way that opens up opportunities to create meaningful relationships and share the Gospel. Johnson continues, “It’s not always fair, and we as coaches have a responsibility to the children to model for them that you don’t quit when you think things are unfair. This is Christianity in practice-to lead by example” (McCracken 50). The young kids are taught life-disciplines and character development

through the values exhibited from being on a sports team, which is the reason that sports are so useful in ministry.

Another example of sports breaking barriers in culture can be found in Hunt's article, "Souls on Ice," about a youth development program in Minnesota called DinoMights "Hockey in the Hood" started by John Foley. This program gives inner-city kids a unique opportunity to play hockey when they normally could not afford it because hockey is such an expensive sport. In 1993, Foley became disturbed by the high dropout rate from school among the teenagers in his youth group. He started the program to motivate inner-city kids to improve their grades and to inspire them to aim for greater opportunities in their future. Hunt explains the standards each team member must uphold in order to stay in the DinoMight program. They are required to maintain good grades and attend school regularly. Tutoring is offered after school and each team member is also emotionally and spiritually mentored. The program teaches the kids responsibility, leadership skills, how to be a man, and how to grow in their relationship with God. The team is full of many diverse races, which is uncommon in hockey leagues because hockey is an expensive sport with all the equipment and upkeep with the ice. The DinoMight program is "bringing about racial harmony; they are breaking the ice of the most minority players in hockey leagues" (Hunt 96). John Foley's hockey ministry is a great example of a sports ministry that brings unity and morals to a group of young people. A testimony of the ministry's effectiveness comes from a prior DinoMight hockey player, Kayavin Unger, who now plays on a high school team. He says that the DinoMights taught him "a lot of important things like responsibility, taking control of my actions, and being a leader. It has taught me more about God and how to be a man" (Hunt 97). This is yet another example of how sports teams have

developed character values and disciplines in these inner-city students that otherwise has been ignored by the rest of society.

An example of the effectiveness of a current nonreligious sports program in Honduras is explained by Jason Old. He is a Spanish language professor at Southeastern University in Lakeland, Florida and is an anthropologist that travels throughout Latin America. He used to play soccer semi-professionally and professionally in Honduras, and now runs a non-profit sports' organization called CAN Football Foundation in Roatan, Honduras. The foundation implements positive reinforcement in the lives of Honduran nationals. During an interview, Old explains how sports transcend everything no matter how rich or poor a person may be: "On the field, money doesn't matter; what matters is how well you can play" (Old). He asserts that sports, particularly soccer, can be used for peace building. For example, organizations such as the International Platform for Sport and Development are a worldwide forum for groups of organizations that use sports for peace building in places such as the Middle East. It is interesting to note that most people play, watch, or at least know something about sports, which is an advantage for the promotion of sports' ministries. He continues to explain how sports can also be used to empower women around the world who have no rights so that they can feel good about themselves. Another way sports can be useful is how they are able to mobilize large groups of people. Messages can easily be relayed to the audience using ads and other modes, which can open up a door to presenting the Gospel. Also, top players become sports ambassadors for the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), which is a United Nations Program that provides long-term humanitarian and developmental assistance to children and mothers in developing countries (Old). This is important for both politicians and ministries that may desire to use top Christian players to benefit their mission. Jason Old's overall mindset is to show the love of God

through his actions, which is the proper method to instill when bringing the Gospel to North Korea.

Sports diplomacy around the world is a great example of how sports are used to connect with people, despite differences. Goldberg explains in his article, "Sporting Diplomacy: Boosting the size of the Diplomatic Corps," how sports break down stereotypes and increase understanding. Furthermore, in sports, despite nationalistic feelings, fans will applaud the accomplishments of heroic players from opposing societies out of respect for the athletes' talent and hard work (Goldberg). Sports are truly able to provide connections that transcend hostility between enemies or conflicting parties. For example, according to Foegen, "sports exchanges between the United States and Cuba, Iran, and North Korea can break down stereotypes, increase understanding, and confine battles to the playing field rather than the battlefield. They are a 'safe' way to ease a country out of isolation acting as a first step of engagement, if not the first step" (Foegen 63). Cultural exchange, through sports and people-to-people contacts between antagonistic nations, does in fact have positive results in bringing about peaceful relations, not war; therefore, this is supporting evidence that the chance of foreigners being accepted into North Korea via sports exchange is a possibility.

Sports have been around since 2000 BC and are used as a medium of economic, social, and political mediation (Usman). The first known example of sports ever being used as a diplomatic tool was practiced in the early 1960s between China and the USA during the Cold War. Both China and the United States participated in the 31st World Table Tennis Championship held in Japan in 1971 (Hong and Sung). However, China did not plan to enter until two days prior the championship, and furthermore, they had no intentions of even associating with America. Zhou, the first Premier of the People's Republic of China, realized the

importance of participating in the Championship and “proposed the slogan [to Mao Zedong], ‘Friendship First, Competition Second’ with the rationale that a political victory would far outweigh winning at the tennis table” (Hong and Sun 433). Mao Zedong, former chairman of the Communist Party of China, agreed with Zhou and decided to send the Chinese table tennis team to the championship. They were risking the lives of their table tennis players by allowing them to compete in the championship. China only decided to compete in the championship because they wanted to maintain credibility with Goto, the president of the Japanese Table Tennis Association, in order to continue participating in future international competitions. After both China and the US sent teams to Japan to play in the World Table Tennis Championship for Ping Pong, the players participated in people-to-people contacts and somewhat befriended each other. However the Chinese leaders’ initial intentions for participating in the World Table Tennis Championship were to “use this international occasion as a means to resume their country’s participation in international activities after the Cultural Revolution and to expand its influence in Asia and the world” (Hong and Sun 434).

The interaction between China and the United States was initiated by Graham B. Steenhoven, the American president of the US Table Tennis Association and head of the American delegation, and Song Zhong, the general secretary of the Chinese delegation. Because of a dramatic mix-up, American player Glenn Cowen accidentally got in the van with the Chinese team and the Chinese player Zhuang Zedong initiated a conversation with him. This led to Zedong exchanging a gift with Cowen of an embroidered banner with Yellow Mountain scenery on it. Zedong was not allowed to initiate conversation with an American according to Chinese authorities; however, when questioned, he simply responded, “Take it easy... I am just a player. It doesn’t matter” (Hong and Sun 436). Even though table tennis is considered part of

politics, sports and sports players still have the advantage of freedom from political responsibilities as normal citizens. As a result, the Chinese and American teams were able to interact with each other without fear of political consequences, so “the next day, [Cowen] returned the favor by giving Zhuang a carefully chosen T-shirt, with the three-colored (red, white and blue) flag symbolizing peace and the English words ‘Let it Be’ on it” (Hong and Sun 436). China was intending to invite the Canadian team to China and not the American team, but Mao Zedong changed his mind after reading about the interaction between Cowen and Zhuang. Zhou Enlai, who dealt with foreign relations, extended the invitation to the American team through Zhao Zhenghong, the Chinese delegate in Japan at the time. Zhou emphasized the importance of giving the Americans a warm welcome and invitation to China. On 10 April 1971, the United States Table Tennis Team entered Hong Kong and began their historic seven day visit in China (Hong and Sun).

The fifteen US ping pong players who visited China were not biased on the politics between the US and China; therefore, they were able to give their straightforward opinions and unbiased facts of the People’s Republic. For example, one player, Glenn Cowen, said of the visit to China, “It was fantastic, really fantastic. The Chinese people are just like us. They’re real, they’re genuine, and they’ve got feelings” (Hong and Sun 443). China was trying to practice ‘people’s diplomacy’ and not mention or involve any politics, but instead focus on diplomacy and friendliness, using people-to-people contacts with average citizens who are indifferent to politics. This incident in turn led to rapprochement between Richard Nixon and Mao Zedong (Hong and Sun). Consequently, “exchanges began to take place 1971-1977 involving academics, businessmen and musicians and imposed on foreign policy in China” (Chehabi 101). As a result, on 14 April 1971, America ended its ban on direct trade with China, and Nixon went to China to

begin the rapprochement of relations with Mao Zedong. The teams participated in cultural exchange and befriended each other on a sports level, proving that sports can transcend many obstacles, even between hostile nations.

Based off of the example of Ping-Pong diplomacy, H.E. Chehabi explains in “Sports Diplomacy between the United States and Iran” how Iran and the USA organized a soccer game and a wrestling match, where the players exchanged gifts and practiced good sportsmanship to mend relationships. Sports diplomacy forces the societies to make the decision to rethink their relationship and break the ice between officials. The hostility between Iran and the US was a result of the Iranians anger toward the US for meddling in their affairs and shooting down a civilian aircraft. Iran even called the US the “Great Satan” and the root of all evil. However, now Iran wants American pop culture, and they are secure enough in their independence that they no longer feel threatened by American imperialism and are ready and willing to rejoin the international society. Meanwhile, the US was angry that Iran took American hostages and was creating nuclear bombs, which shows that Iran and the US were mutually hostile toward each other (Chehabi).

After Mohammad Khatami was elected as the Iranian president in May 1997, he wanted to improve relations with America and even praised America for its religious tolerance (Chehabi). He suggested engaging in people-to-people contacts using the ping pong diplomacy as an example to improve relations with America. The President’s chief of the cabinet explains the purpose and effectiveness of these engagements: “Our aim is to force our adversaries to accept change with the support of public opinion” (Chehabi 90). As a result of Khatami’s invitation to America, there were many small scale people-to-people contacts that occurred between Iran and the US. The most popular contacts came through a soccer match on 21 June

1998 in Lyons, France and a few organized wrestling matches, where the players exchanged gifts and practiced good sportsmanship to mend the relationship. Chehabi explains that “when athletic games take place that are accompanied by mutual signaling of goodwill and friendly cheering spectators,” a shift in attitudes can be expected (90). If two opposing nations even consider getting together to compete in a sport competition, then the nations are already considering redefining their relationship together (Chehabi 90).

When Iran and America were forming activities for sports diplomacy, they chose sports that were the biggest and most popular in Iran: soccer and wrestling. They chose soccer because both nations are minor players internationally, and they also chose freestyle wrestling because both nations are among the best in the world. The reason for choosing sports that both teams can compete in at the same level is to prevent humiliating defeats on either side that would end up causing more harm than good (Chehabi). Before the soccer game, President Clinton taped a message “in which he expressed the hope that the game would be a ‘step toward ending the estrangement between our nations’” (Chehabi 99). Before the game, both teams took a group photo together and then exchanged gifts, while at end of the game, in which Iran won two to one, the players exchanged shirts. On 1 February 1999, both the Iranian and American soccer teams received the FIFA Fair Play award because they displayed sportsmanlike conduct (Chehabi).

President Clinton congratulated Iran on their win and Iran celebrated with great enthusiasm. However, most Americans ignored the loss because international sports competitions are not as popular as national sports competitions within the United States. In this case, it would be very difficult to change the perceptions and viewpoints of the American public toward Iran solely based on acts of sports diplomacy. Conversely, in Iran, international sports are highly valued and watched among the people; therefore, their perceptions of the relations with

America may have positively changed. Before in 1950, the Iranian football team's manager wrote "people have to learn to play together before they can work together" after Pennsylvania State University was asked by Iranian football federation to send the varsity soccer team on tour of Iran (Chehabi 96). Iranian sports teams are told to spread Islamic propaganda abroad, so that is another reason the nation allows their sports teams to go abroad and they even encourage it (Chehabi). Iran's motivation for participating in sporting events proves how sports are used to push both political and spiritual agendas.

Another example of a sport that has been used as a diplomatic tool among hostile countries is explained by Muhammad Usman in "Cricketing Language in the Political Discourse of Pakistan." Cricket is the most popular sport in Pakistan and its terminology is often used in political language. It is also the favorite sport in south Asia and is used for political diplomacy between Pakistan and India. For example,

The terminology 'Cricket Diplomacy' is as famous as the game itself and has been an important political tool to revitalize the diplomatic relations of Pakistan and India.

Employed multiple times, the most recent example is of the World Cup Cricket 2011, Semi-Final between Pakistan and India when the Prime Minister of Pakistan visited India to strengthen the much deteriorated bilateral relations. (Usman 2)

Sports influence the language of a particular society and, therefore, cricket metaphors are used in political language in Pakistan. It helps the politician effectively communicate with the audience in order to influence them and to promote a certain political and social mindset. The politicians also use cricket metaphors to communicate better with their audiences. Politicians are known as "linguistic manipulators," so in order to be understood and favored by the general public, politicians use Cricket terminology and analogies to gain the understanding and support of the

people (Usman). Sports have a unique impact on political language by being able to manipulate and influence an audience in a particular way. The language of sports connects to people on a higher and more trustworthy level, which is why politicians use it to manipulate their audience. Overall, after years of Pakistan and India being on the brink of a nuclear war with the Kashmir Crisis and the scourge of terror, “Pakistani Prime minister Yousaf Raza Gilana accepted an invitation from his Indian counterpart, Manmohan Singh, to attend the Cricket World Cup semi-final match between the South Asian rival in March 2011” (Murray 583). Singh and Gilani met again later that year at a South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation and decided to begin the process of mending their political relations (Murray). More recently, sports have been used more often in diplomacy for political benefits throughout the world as nations discover its success.

Stuart Murray provides reasoning and evidence of why and how sports are effective as a tool in sports diplomacy between conflicting nations in his article, “Two-Halves of Sporting Diplomacy.” Gareth Evans, the Australian foreign minister from 1988 to 1996, defined public diplomacy as “an exercise in persuasion and influence that extends beyond traditional diplomacy by leveraging a much larger cast of player both inside and outside government” (Murray 580). Public diplomacy can include people such as artists, teachers, students, athletes, travellers, researchers, experts, and young people to take part in diplomatic relations. Sports diplomacy is one of these new innovative and creative methods of public diplomacy that includes using famous sports players, sports teams, the fans, and spectators as tools. The practice of sports diplomacy uses “sports people and sporting events to engage, inform, and create a favorable image amongst foreign publics and organizations to shape their perceptions in a way that is more conducive to achieving a government’s foreign policy goals” (Murray 581). Sports players have

influence and the sport itself has a sort of magical power to bring people together and gain the love and approval of masses that are dramatically different socio-politically (Murray).

The benefits of using sports for diplomatic purposes include the following: every culture enjoys sports, iconic players have major influence in the world, estranged peoples are able to relate through sports, sports encourage honorable qualities and values, and sports can also transcend stereotypes and prejudices in order to understand differences and promote friendships. Jim Cain, a former United States ambassador to Denmark, said of sports diplomacy in 2009 at the Second Hague Conference in Diplomacy that, “sports can be a powerful medium to reach out and build relationships...across cultural and ethnic divides, with a positive message of shared values: values such as mutual respect, tolerance, compassion, discipline, equality of opportunity and the rule of law” (Murray 582). And yet again, FIFA President Joseph “Sepp” Blatter, argues,

FIFA is no longer merely an institution that runs our sport. It has now taken on a social, cultural, political and sporting dimension in the struggle to educate children and defeat poverty. At the same time it has also become a powerful economic phenomenon...Football can move mountains. (Murray 584)

Many reputable and credible sources such as FIFA’s President and other diplomats in international politics agree that sports have a multiplicity of purposes and effectiveness in today’s society to influence such diverse areas as politics and cultures. Numerous sports have had a positive impact on relationships between nations. Sports also have the unique ability to influence society by providing opportunities and encouragement for individuals in suppressed cultures.

CHAPTER 3: BACKGROUND ON NORTH KOREA

History of North Korea

In order to understand a specific people group, one must understand the spectrum of their history of troubles and successes. When we are able to understand the North Koreans, we will then be able to develop a recreational ministry that will connect with the people and be accepted by their culture. Lee explains the article, “Chosŏn (Yi Dynasty), that in “ In Korea’s early history, the main dynasty that ruled Korea for centuries before it became communized was the Choson (Yi) dynasty, which was operated on Neo-Confucian ideals. The ruler, King T’aejo proclaimed himself king of Korea and legitimized his rule by claiming he saved the people from past corrupted leaders. The Korean state was named Choson in 1392 by King T’aejo, who declared himself founder of the Yi dynasty, which lasted until 1910 (Lee, “Chosŏn (Yi Dynasty)”). He justified his power by claiming the public compelled him to take the throne in order to rescue them from the previous fraudulent rulers. The state was run by Neo-Confucian ideals, so they rejected Buddhism and seized the temples. Education was also important to society in preparing students for the civil service exam. Public school was meant to recruit and train officials in order to instill loyalty into the young people. The military exam was depreciated and considered less prestigious than the civil service exam; therefore, the military was weak when the Choson dynasty was attacked by the Japanese and the Manchu. Because the Choson dynasty took part in trade and cultural exchange with China, the peninsula was able to remain connected to the rest of the world. Therefore, Koreans were heavily influenced by Chinese culture and politics and were easily conquered by foreign empires (Lee, “Chosŏn (Yi Dynasty)”). These details are examples of why North Korea tries to present itself as so independent, why their military is so strong, and how officials are able to legitimize their rule.

Clarence Vosburgh Gilliland explains in the article, “Japan and Korea Since 1910” that since the 19th century control of Korea has been fought over by the Chinese, Japanese, and even the Russians. The Japanese have had steady control over Korea up until the early 20th century. In 1910, Japan took official control over Korea in the hopes of improving and developing the society. They improved health conditions and sanitation, established a new monetary system based off the gold standard, built public school systems, improved agricultural systems, and made many other developments. However, the Koreans did not like the Japanese control because they acted in a spirit of superiority over the nationals of Korea. For example, the Koreans were not permitted to learn Korean in school, only Japanese. The government and business affairs were controlled by the Japanese, and one-third of the Korean land was forcefully taken by the Japanese (Gilliland). From 1905- 1918, the Japanese controlled Korea by “suppressing all Korean newspapers and magazines, closed down many mission and private schools, took over a large amount of land, and made efforts to prevent Koreans from establishing new commercial and industrial enterprises” (Szalontai 5). Basically, the Japanese attempted to remove the nationalistic and independent pride of the Korean people.

Finally, in 1919, the Koreans protested and the Japanese gave them some freedom to entrepreneurship and to create their own newspapers and magazines, even though they were highly censored (Gilliland). During Japanese colonization of Korea, “thousands of Koreans studied in Japan, many of whom adopted democratic and leftist ideas under the influence of Japanese liberal, anarchist, and communist intellectuals” (Szalontai 5–6). The Koreans claimed independence from Japan in 1919; yet in the meantime, the Koreans were brutally tortured but still maintained hope for independence. These actions by the Japanese caused the Koreans to resent Japanese control because they acted as superiors over the native Koreans (Szalontai). This

piece of historical evidence helps explain the North Korean hatred toward outsiders and imperialists. Scott Snyder notes that “at the level of the state, survival, endurance and resistance against foreign forces who seek to dominate or subjugate the Korean people are recurrent historical themes that date back to the Tang Dynasty” (Kang 42). Larger stronger forces were constantly involving themselves in Korea’s affairs throughout its early history. Korea is in a very critical geographical location that many surrounding nations wanted to occupy for their own purposes. Korea was considered a “shrimp among whales” throughout its history because she was amid the largest, most powerful nations of the world, including Japan, China, Russia, and the United States (Kang 42). Being that Korea has been such a vulnerable nation due to their location among large empires and their small size, they are now overly cautious, defensive, and skeptical of outsiders. Because the Korean people felt taken advantage of throughout their history, now the North Korean empire maintains a nationalistic pride to run the country and a hermit-like status for protection against the world.

Also, in order to understand the North Korean regime, one must recognize that facts are concealed from the general knowledge of the entire world and the North Korean nationals. Myths substitute hard facts in order to make people believe that North Korea and its leader are divine (Lintner). Facts concerning North Korea and its history have been discovered by historians from the Soviet-era archives, but myths were created by the North Korean regime in order to maintain respect among the people toward their leaders (Lintner). Kim Il Sung was a Korean guerilla leader that fled to the Soviet Union from Japanese invasion of Korea. On 16 February 1942, Kim Jung Il was born in a camp near Vyatskoye, which is information hidden from Korean knowledge. Kim Il Sung was the highest ranking commander in the camp, overseeing a force of a few hundred men (Lintner 3). According to Bertil Lintner, a Swedish

journalist who has specialized in writing on Asian affairs for over four decades, “by all accounts, [Sung] never ventured into Korea during the war, remaining far behind the front lines” (Lintner 3). This is classified information because the North Korean regime does not want the people to know their leader was afraid or seemed like a coward. Kim Il Sung did not arrive back in North Korea until after the Soviet Union took occupation of Pyongyang and northern Korea in August 1945, and the people began celebrating victory in October. Sung was considered unimpressive because he did not fight in the battle to deliver northern Korea with the Soviets (Lankov). It was the Soviet army that placed Kim Il Sung as the head of the North Korean Provisional People’s committee in February of 1946, which was the country’s new established government. The Soviet Union wanted to turn northern Korea into a communist state because it was the beginnings of the Cold War and their rival, the United States, had taken over southern Korea to turn them into a democratic state (Lankov 3).

The myths created by North Korean propaganda leaders include:

Kim Il Sung and his wife were bravely leading the heroic struggle against the Japanese from mountain hideouts on the border between Korea and Manchuria when Kim Jong Il was born. At his birth-on Mount Paekdu, Korea's highest and most sacred peak-a double rainbow arched over the family's log cabin, a new star appeared in the sky and a swallow flew overhead to announce that a great general had come into the world. When Kim Jong Il was three and a half, his father personally fought and defeated the Japanese, marched into Pyongyang and liberated Korea. (Lintner)

These myths were instilled to make Kim Il Sung and his son, Kim Jung Il’s hereditary rule sound legitimate and to create a blind trust among the North Korean citizens. In reality, Sung was “born into a moderately affluent family with above average income as well as access to modern

education” (Lankov 3). His father made a modest living as a practitioner of herbal medicine, but the North Korean propaganda claims that Sung was the son of a poor farmer so that he could relate to the lower class, whom would be most interested in communism (Lankov 3). In Sung’s 30s, he joined the communist guerillas in Manchuria with China’s communist party, but propaganda claims he created the Korean guerilla army at age 20 (Lankov 3). North Korea’s propaganda legitimized Kim Il Sung’s corrupt rule by lying about his early beginnings and displaying him to be far greater than he is in reality.

In 1956, after Stalin died, both Soviet Russia and China were moving toward post-Stalinism and wanted to take Kim Il Sung out of power, but the young people in North Korea were against this because they were nationalistic and wanted to be their own independent state (Lankov 12). With ample support, Sung took complete control and established his rule by creating North Korea’s vision: “Their realm would be a country where all of the people would work hard on huge state owned farms and factories breaking the records of productivity while being motivated by unswerving ideological zeal and love for country” (Lankov 17). Each citizen was to live off the same rations of food and goods, no one was to make any profits, and they were to be led by the Great Leader and seemingly devout and selfless officials (Lankov 17). The citizens found this new idea attractive because of the pitiful circumstances they were in at the time. During Sung’s forty-nine year reign, he elevated himself to a divine status as the “Great Leader” of North Korea. Kim Il Sung tried to enact a “clan-centered Confucian autocracy,” and he was the first in the history of the world to establish a hereditary Stalinist dictatorship after he appointed his son, Kim Jong Il as the successor to his reign and the next “Dear Leader” of the nation (Lintner 7). The facts about Kim Il Sung’s presence in Soviet Russia were not exposed until 1991, when the Soviet Union fell and when Soviet records were declassified (Lintner). This

information is confidential because the North Korean leaders do not want the people to know their divine leader did not win against the Japanese by heroic circumstances, but instead by undercover operations not to be noticed by the Japanese.

The people of North Korea have been controlled and oppressed by rulers throughout their history, whether it was from the Japanese, the Chinese, the Russians, threats of imperialism from the United States, and now from their own leaders within the nation's regime. The people followed Kim Il Sung in the beginning because he was hope for their nation becoming independent from their history of being controlled. He was encouragement to them and told them their race was special and the best in the world. He provided a sense of "freedom" for the Koreans to be themselves. Presently, the nation is hostile toward all nations that try to change their ways or threaten them with imperialism. The leaders run their regime based on fear of the outside world to create compliance and blind trust among the citizens.

Psychology of Politics/ Ideology/ Government

According to "North Korea: The Politics of Leadership Change," by Avram Agov, the leadership of North Korea is able to maintain complete control over the nation because Confucian ideals, such as loyalty and unity, promote loyalty to the rulers and unity among the nation's citizens. Many of the ideals and practices of the North Korean regime have been influenced directly by their history. For example, the Choson dynasty had a family monarchy and lived by Confucian ideals, which were adopted and passed down to the ruling of the Kim family and the establishment of the new regime. Kim Il Sung's "idea of leadership was a reflection of his perception of the world: an intense nationalistic desire for political independence, a reliance on militaristic means of survival, and Stalinist and Marxist influences" (Kang 43). Agov

describes how Confucianism has allowed the Kim leaders to attain their divine and fatherly status among the people:

The patriarchic and patrilineal thrust of Korean Confucianism created a father status for the Chosŏn kings. According to the moral standards of royal sage-hood, the Korean monarch was also expected to play the roles of exemplar, civilizer, and sustainer of the dynasty, chief priest, and upholder of the classics. Similarly, Kim Il Sung is a founder of the DPRK and father of the North Korean people, including creator and priest of juche orthodoxy, socialism builder, civilizer, and ‘eternal president,’ a sage with sacred attributes such as tombs and shrines. North Korea’s Great Leader thus reached the status of Confucian sage king in the sense that the position is both secular and sacred. (Agov 18)

The ruling elite used myths and legacies as propaganda to promote loyalty to the Great Leader. North Korea is revealed as a blissful state living in harmony. Agov describes the state as a “theater state” indicating the country is putting on a show for the world, with its leading actors being the Kim family. Agov calls the nation a show because the majority of how North Korea presents itself is inaccurate. They do not live in perfect harmony and are not all content-spirited.

They have a strong nationalistic mentality that endorses its citizens into believing they are the best and “cleanest” race in the entire world by instilling national pride and a sense of identity in the people (Agov). Due to the fact that the nation of Korea has been controlled by other nations throughout its history, nationalistic leaders of North Korea infused animosity and mistrust in its citizens toward outsiders because they are viewed as imperialists. This is how the leaders have tried to create a sense of unity and loyalty among the people toward the leftist leaders. The North Korean people were pro-communism at the time because “communism’s

appeal stemmed from promises to liberate society from imperialism, political oppression, and economic exploitation and to build a prosperous and free country” (Agov 19). The North Koreans worship the Kim family because they have freed the people from imperialism under Japan and created an independent, “prosperous” society. When these ideologies do not make the citizens cooperate, leadership uses the military to instill fear in the people. The people are so devoted to the ruler of North Korea that the slogan, “‘We are the general’s family,’ epitomized North Korean households” (Agov 14). Kim Jong Il is seen as the Father of the nation, while the people are the body. The Father loves the people and then the people are loyal to their father for loving them and taking care of them. Kim Jong Un unifies the political party, the army, and the people under the *juche* philosophy (Agov 18).

In order to ensure the citizens are faithfully following the Great Leader, Agov explains that North Korean nationals are brainwashed in school from an early age. From kindergarten to the university level, they are taught on the divinity of the Great Leader, Kim II Sung, in each class subject. They are taught the *Juche* (self-identity) *Sasang* (organized thoughts), which is their ideology of self-reliance. The reason Kim II Sung created *Juche* is revealed in a statement he made after Stalin died in 1953, “We do not blindly follow foreign ideas, policies, or dogmas. We are our own masters in solving our own problems independently and creatively” (Agov 24). According to this ideology, the North Koreans are taught that Kim II Sung is literally the state, so when the people are loyal to the regime, they are being loyal to the Great Leader. Agov explains how the people are encouraged to believe that they have two lives: biological, which is from their parents, and political, which is given from the Great Leader. Their goal in life is to be loyal and bring joy to the Great Leader, whom is their political Father of the state. As a result, “the people’s absolute belief in the Great Leaders is the strange but unshakable foundation of the

North Korean regime, as well as the source of its stability in the face of problems” (Agov 22). According to Hyun-Sik Kim, a former member of the Korean Worker’s Party for 50 years and personal tutor for the children of Kim Il Sung, the ultimate goal of the Great Leader, Kim Il Sung is to “(1) to govern North Korea in accordance with *Juche Sasang*, (2) to bring the entire Korean Peninsula under his rule by achieving the liberation of South Korea from the occupying U.S. forces, and (3) to govern the whole world through *Juche Sasang*” (Sik Kim 24). Essentially, the motives of the regime are to bring South Korea and then the rest of the world under *juche* rule.

Allen Kang discusses in his article, “The Lens of Juche: Understanding the Reality of North Korean Policymakers,” how the North Korean *juche* ideology also affects their international and domestic affairs. Korea has been dominated and controlled by foreign forces for most of its history, and then when Kim Il Sung, a revolutionary guerilla fighter, came to power, he acted as the nation’s savior from impending imperialists. The *juche* philosophy is based on self-reliance and defying fate. North Korea hates the USA and Western countries because they feel threatened by colonialism. Kang explains the role of the *juche* philosophy used for Kim Il Sung’s personal motivations,

Juche gives the regime and its dictator legitimacy and a reason for being. Kim Il Sung becomes the provider of political independence for the North Korean people. He assumes the role of a great protector against foreign ‘imperialists’ who seek to dominate and exploit the North Korean people: ‘As long as we have the dear comrade leader, we will not fear any difficult or big enemy but will always be ever-victorious.’ (43)

It would help North Korea economically to open up its borders, but they cannot because the people will realize the illegitimacy of the Kim family rule from outsiders, which could cause the

juche regime to deteriorate (Kang). Therefore, the country will not be able to transform unless the people take action of self-determination and make changes.

In order to understand the ruling elite of North Korea most accurately, Kim Il Sung's *juche* philosophy must be analytically examined. As mentioned prior, *juche* is an ideology of self-reliance and the Great Leader is the father of the state and the people are the united body. As Kim Jong Il explains *juche* himself, he illuminates his train of thought: "The *juche* [or *juche*] idea indicated ... true human life ... can only be realized admirably in a socialist society based on collectivism. In this society, people are free from all manner of exploitation and oppression, domination and subordination and can lead an independent and creative life" (Kang 43). Kim Il Sung was viewed as the savior of the nation, who freed them from imperialists and brought the nation hope as a united people; and now they can stand alone against the western nations (Kang). Unfortunately, however, the current ideologies and policies used to guide North Korea's government are proving to have negative consequences. For example, creating and maintaining an isolated country brings starvation to the nationals and a lack of resources to survive. Yong Soo Park helps explain why Kim Jong-Il is persisting on ruling according to past ideologies despite the poor circumstances of the state.

The fundamental principles of North Korean politics include the *juche* philosophy, military-first policy, and the monolithic system (Park). The principle of the monolithic system "has been maintained primarily by controlling information and isolating the people from the outside world, both to prevent them from comparing North Korea with other countries and to maintain a sense of hostility toward the outside world in order to reinforce internal unity" (Park 7). If North Korea opened up its borders, the citizens of the country would truly realize how illegitimate the monolithic system is and the sole leader would lose his power. The North Korean

regime is run by a military-first policy, which became the primary ideology after the death of Kim Il Sung in 1994. Both the economy and politics are guided by strong military power, which was able to keep Kim Jung Il in power safely during the uneasy times that followed the death of his father, Kim Il Sung. Furthermore, soldiers are given higher positions in society than other citizens, because they are able to watch over society and monitor the people. They have the control to instill a military-like fear in order keep ideological control among the citizens (Park 8).

North Korean myths can also aid researchers in further understanding the culture. According to “Ancient Korean Myths,” by Gloria Lee, the practice of telling myths is used to legitimize the authority of rulers, which still persists today. The myth of Tan’gun tells the story of the founding of the nation of Korea; therefore, it is a popular tale among the people. It contains themes of harmony and emphasizes the importance of unity. A god comes to earth and has a child with a human who becomes the King, which suggests that all Koreans come from gods (Lee, “Ancient Korean Myth”). The North Korean people are told to consider themselves the superior race in the world partly because they believe they come from supernatural gods. Knowing the myths and religion of the North Korean people will help to organize sports ministry that will specifically target North Koreans in the best way possible. The Holy Spirit may even work through his followers to discover redemptive analogies in the Korean myths to bring people to the saving power of Jesus Christ.

Sports Culture

In North Korea, culture is considered good when it expresses party loyalty, the glorification of the lives of the leaders, nationalism, and patriotism (Jeong and Lee). Their cultural aspects emphasize the North Korean past and heritage as superior to all other cultures. This gives the people a sense of pride; and consequently, those who have pride for their nation,

do not rebel against their government. Every area of North Korean culture expresses the *juche* ideology, which is also why they do not take part in cultural exchange (Jeong and Lee). North Korea does not participate in cultural exchange because the regime believes their race, culture, and political ideology is superior to all other nations, so they would never accept another nation's way of life. Conversely, they want to promote their philosophy of *juche* to other nations. A method to promote the *juche* philosophy is through sports. Kim Il Sung encouraged sports and physical education during the communist revolution to encourage public health and strong communist individuals. In a speech Kim Il-sung made on physical education in 1946, he said,

“[In developing communist individuals] the popularization of physical education has a particularly important meaning. When physical education is popularized, and when people enjoy sport in their everyday life, we can improve our nation's health condition in general, and in so doing, we can make our people to have both a strong body and healthy mind” (Jung Woo Lee and Bairner 395).

Through this quote made by Kim Il-sung in a speech, it is clear that he was a supporter of sports and physical education in promoting the nationalistic, communist mindset that he wanted to instill in his people. He needed to show the world that the North Korean nationals were strong, healthy individuals so that he could prove that communism, especially *juche*, is superior. North Korea is even able to sustain its rule through the practice of sports. Jung Woo Lee and Bairner explain how

The communist state appears to demonstrate its political autonomy and sovereignty to the international society by taking part in various sporting events. Domestically the North Korean government exploits sports as a means of political indoctrination, thereby

ensuring that sport plays a significant role in sustaining the ruling regime in the DPRK. (Jung Woo Lee and Bairner 391)

Lee and Bairner explain four political functions of sports use that researcher, Riordan identified in the Soviet Union and other Eastern European communist societies. First is that sports modernize societies; second, sports serve utilitarian purposes by promoting health and hygiene, industrial development, and a strong state defense; third, sports “aid the integration of a multiethnic collectivity into a unified state;” and fourth, sports allow the communist nations to be recognized internationally (Jung Woo Lee and Bairner 395). These motivations are also useful in explaining the possible importance of sports in North Korea as well.

It is important to know the relationship between sports and North Korean culture in order to know if sports ministry would be beneficial in this particular society. Merkel observes “that the political regime considers sports to be both non-threatening to its power base and ideal for its pursuit of a small number of political objectives” (Merkel 514). Sports seem to be an exception to the *juche* philosophy of self-reliance and isolation because North Korean soccer teams are allowed to travel internationally to compete and promote the country’s image and reputation. We can assume that sports is among the only exceptions in North Korean culture that does not follow *juche* ideology completely because “there are several elements of the global sports culture that have entered the realm of popular culture in North Korea without the state seeking meticulously to control or manage these” (Merkel 514). According to Merkel in his article, “Sport and Physical Culture in North Korea: Resisting, Recognizing, and Relishing Globalization,” the North Korean government is more open and allows the citizens more freedom in regards to sports competitions than in any other area of society. For example, “surprisingly, television coverage of soccer matches from some of the best European leagues is uncensored and freely

available” (Merkel 516). When Portugal versed North Korea in the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, North Korea broadcasted the game live for the first time ever (Merkel). Television is highly censored and monitored by the North Korean Regime, so it is extremely significant that the government does not censor coverage of soccer matches. Also, the North Korean people are not allowed to leave the country freely like in a democracy; but North Korean international sports’ players are among the only citizens allowed to leave the country (Merkel). Conversely, the country allows its sports players to compete internationally because the regime wants to show its pride in their people and eventually spread their ideology of *juche* around the world.

In 1989, Merkel claims Kim Jong Il said, “despite the personality cult around Kim Sung-II and Kim Jong-II, the North Korean media have been encouraged by the county’s former leader to offer additional domestic role models, for example heroes and heroines from the world of sport” (517). For example, Jong Tae-Se, a famous Japanese soccer player born from a North Korean mother but who grew up in a Korean community in Japan, is highly revered by North Korean fans. Not only does this example show how North Korean sports fans are actively engaged in international sports and players outside of their own country, but they are also dedicated fans to those players and even consider them admirable heroes (Merkel 517). Therefore, North Koreans are able to idolize sports’ players, even if the player is outside of Korea. They are allowed to have heroes and heroines beyond the Kim family leaders of North Korea all in the name of sports. It is interesting to note that “despite its nearly complete isolation, not only does North Korea continually participate in various international sport competitions but also regularly invites international athletes to its homeland. Thus, sport is one of the few fields in which the global community can encounter North Korean nationals” (Jung Woo Lee and Bairner

391). Extraordinarily, sports are able to supersede the *juche* ideology and give the people certain freedoms in a way unlike any other form of culture.

One way North Korea is seen defying their *juche* principles is by participating in the international Olympic Games. The origin of the Olympic Games is a sporting event that started on the ideals of bringing countries together peacefully and in unity in the name of healthy, fun competition (Goldberg). The Olympic Festivals were first started in 776 BC with the Greeks (Goldberg). The purpose of the first games was to unify the civilized nations under sports, which are able to defy political differences. This is supported by the Olympic Charter, “that at the heart of the modern Olympic movement is a desire to contribute ‘to building a peaceful and better world’” (Goldberg 64). Even though this was the motivation of the Olympic Games, communist nations, such as East Germany and Russia for example, used their athletic presence and competition to win the support of developing nations and prove the superiority of their socialist political system over capitalist countries (Goldberg 64).

North Korea wanted to participate in the Olympics, but the International Olympic Committee (IOC) “recognized South Korea as the official Korean Olympic team” and not North Korea individually (Jung Woo Lee and Bairner 396). However, after communist German Democratic Republic participated in the 1956 Olympic Games, “communist Korea actively lobbied the IOC for acknowledgment as a member state of the IOC” and in 1962, the IOC began negotiations to allow North Korea to be recognized as a member (Jung Woo Lee and Bairner 396). North Korea was able to finally participate in the Winter Olympics in 1964 in Tokyo and their first summer Olympics in 1972 (Taylor). Currently, when North Korea participates in the Olympics, they have to send all their athletes, trainers, and other support staff overseas when normally citizens are not allowed out of the country. However, during the Olympic Games, the

athletes are not permitted to leave their Olympic compound to explore the city and go sight-seeing. They were not allowed to talk to reporters nor even socialize with other athletes (Taylor). Grigore Scarlatoiu, executive director of the Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, explains how North Korea intends that “Any success [by North Korean athletes at the Olympics] will be used extensively for propaganda purposes,” (Andersen 10). Ericka Andersen, from the Heritage Foundation, explains that if select athletes do not win any metals or awards for the North Korean nation’s pride, they are sent to prison camps as punishment. The Communist Party’s Sports Committee forces the athletes into training at a young age and are brainwashed to attribute their success and strength to the Great Leader (Andersen). For example, Kim Un-Gunk, a Gold medal winner who set a record in weightlifting said he “won first place because the shining Supreme Commander Kim Jong-Un gave me power and courage” (Andersen 4).

Even though the athletes are highly restricted while participating in the Olympic Games and are required to win medals, during the Games in London, North Korean nationals were allowed to watch some of the events on television. A South Korean broadcaster who dealt with North Korea’s technical logistics said that “North Korea is allowing five hours of daily coverage of the London Olympics to be shown on its TV network” (Ramstad 1). Then North Korea allowed more coverage as its athletes began to win gold medals. This is of no concern to many North Koreans, however, because most of the citizens cannot afford to buy a television. However, it is important to note that even though North Korea was strict with its athletes, they still allowed the athletes to travel abroad and permitted the fans back home to watch the events on television, which is against the regime’s *juche* philosophy guidelines. Nevertheless, examples from the Olympic Games show how sports are an exception to many of North Korea’s rules and an open door to penetrate the hermit kingdom.

Football (soccer), Taekwondo, and the Arirang (mass gymnastics game) are popular sports in North Korea and examples used for international recognition. Kim Jong-il said in a presentation to the senior officials of the Central Committee of Workers' Party of Korea on 2 June 1989,

Football is the basis of sport and it suits the physical constitutions of our people. When our football skills are developed and our player beat the teams of other countries in international events, we will be able to demonstrate the might of our country. Sport authorities should exert every effort to develop our football skills. (Jung Woo Lee and Bairner 398).

Through this presentation made by Kim Jong-il, it appears that football is important to the North Korean people and the political agenda of the country. Football is a crucial aspect in showing the world that the North Korean ethnic group is superior to all other racial groups. Kim Jong-il continued saying of the women's football team, "As our women football player have not played many international games, we should frequently send them to international tournaments" (Jung Woo Lee and Bairner 398). Sport is important to the North Korean regime to the extent that they even send teams to competitions internationally, which is normally forbidden. One of the only reasons in which North Korea opens up its borders is through the motivation of sports competition.

Taekwondo is also used for political propaganda and is a sport of North Korean pride because it originated in Korea and is the national sport of North and South Korea (Jung Woo Lee and Bairner). This makes "the martial art one of the, if not the most, politically significant sports in North Korea" (Jung Woo Lee and Bairner 402). Taekwondo promotes the ideology of "Korea is best" nationalism. With this knowledge, it could be a possibility for North Koreans to be sent

out internationally to teach this form of martial arts to the world and be highly honored for their skill. This could open up an opportunity for North Korean martial arts teacher to be exposed to the Gospel internationally and then to bring back the Good News of Jesus Christ to their people.

Finally, the Arirang, which is a mass gymnastics game in North Korea, is another method in which North Korea opens up its border to the nations of the world. It is highly choreographed and one of the most spectacular events in North Korea. The Arirang performance “embraces a range of political propaganda, and nationalism is the underlying theme throughout. In addition, the idolization of the late Kim Il-sung and the promotion of the party’s ideology frequently appear during the show” (Jung Woo Lee and Bairner 403). The show is displayed in the capital city, Pyongyang, on national holidays, such as the birthdays of the rulers. There are more than 10,000 performers that participate in the show, which consists of six parts including the nation’s history, its military, industrial development, and the reunification of Korea (Jung Woo Lee and Bairner). The nation’s feelings and emotions are reflected throughout the performance. Kim Jong-il declared in a talk with organizers of the mass gymnastics game (MGG) in April 1987 that,

Our MGG is a complex and popular culture that consists of a decent ideology, artistic feature and physical technique. Developing an MGG programme has a significant meaning in breeding youth people into all-around communist individuals... In order to become all-around communist individuals, it is essential to have revolutionary ideological consciousness, versatile knowledge, rich cultural acquirements and physical strength. With regard to this, an MGG plays an important role in making young people acquire such communist characters. (Jung Woo Lee and Bairner 403)

Kim Jung-il promoted the mass gymnastics games in order to instill a communist mindset in the young people, while simultaneously promoting North Korean ideals to the viewers of the show, North Korean nationals and international tourists. Kim Jung-il liked international visitors to watch the show because he wanted to spread his ideology of *juche* and create a feeling of admiration and envy toward the Korean race. Kim Jung-il understood that sports and shows have powerful influence to promote new ideas and instill them in people's minds.

Hyun-Sik Kim, a member of the Korean Worker's Party for 50 years and a personal tutor for the children of Kim II Sung, explains the mysterious reason north Korea has Christian churches in his article, "Reflections on North Korea: The Psychological Foundation of the North Korean Regime and Its Governing Philosophy." In the capital city of North Korea, Pyongyang, there is a Catholic church and a Protestant church. They were built in 1989 for an international student sports festival and competition being held in Pyongyang. They were built for the spiritual needs of the visitors, but their true purpose is explained by Hyun-Sik Kim:

These religious institutions were not built to enable North Koreans to worship but to show the world that there was freedom of religion in North Korea. The regime also intended to lure American and South Korean Christians into forming pro-North Korea groups. The government also wanted to secure economic aid from the Christians, but the true purpose of welcoming Christians was to spread the ideology of the Great Leader to the world. (Sik Kim 25)

The North Korean government's intentions and motivations for every action they take are based on glorifying their Great Leader. The decisions they make are grounded in the desire to make *juche* ideology and the Kim dynasty ruler over South Korea and eventually, the entire world.

Sports are an avenue to create and foster a strong sense of nationalistic pride for one's own country to be successful. Surprisingly, sports do not create significant and impending tensions toward the athletes and cultures of other countries (Goldberg 66); therefore, sports can easily be used for diplomatic rapprochement. In global sports, fans are able to root for the enemy nation if the athlete deserves recognition for his or her talents. For instance,

The ability to applaud accomplishments and effort regardless of nationality is what allows sports to act as a channel for goodwill and greater understanding. Sports provide a healthy outlet to nationalism where, even in defeat, another country's heroes are glorified (rather than its political leaders vilified). (Goldberg 66)

In fact, in 1979, the United States played Iran in the World Cup in France and "instead of animosity and conflict, the game was characterized by sportsmanship, respect, and good feelings. Americans were able to view Iranians as sports fans and human beings rather than terrorists" (Goldberg 68). Sports are uniquely able to defy cultural and political differences because everyone is competing at the same level and are held to the same standards. Also, diverse cultures are able to find commonalities through the use of sporting jargon because it is a transcultural language. Overall, sports can relate to a multiplicity of cultural groups because they defy ethnic boundaries, wane animosity among hostile nations, and are a point of commonality among a vast number of the world's population.

CHAPTER 4: APPLICATION

Missional ministry searches for open doors as a means of penetrating nations resistant to the Gospel, whether they are communist or secular. North Korea is one of the most resistant nations toward outside ideas that go against their *juche* ideology. The country is even considered the “black hole” of the world because no one knows what occurs behind its borders, making the nation enigmatic. They are almost completely closed off to the outside world, and the officials highly monitor those both crossing in and out of their nation’s borders. For decades, missionaries and other humanitarians have tried to find open doors to reaching through the obstacles of North Korea’s resistance. Many methods and attempts have tried and failed. Dr. Bob Houlihan, who has had personal experience trying to provide aid and support for this nation, has run into road blocks over and over again. He is a former Assemblies of God missionary and currently a professor at Southeastern University in Lakeland, Florida. He testifies that North Korean officials, leaders, and soldiers do not reason, do not make sense, and do not want anyone influencing their country (Houlihan). With this discouraging information, it seems nearly impossible to reach the nation of North Korea with the Gospel; therefore, any opportunity for even the slightest open door into the hostile country is extremely valuable. For this reason, sports ministry should be seriously considered as a method for building relationships in North Korea, and ultimately should be used to reach the nation with the love of Christ. Research and evidence show that sports have a unique influence on people and conflicting nations, and therefore could be the key for an open door into North Korea that has been long awaited.

How this sports ministry must be developed is the crucial question that remains in proving sports’ trustworthiness as an open door. Tim Tucker and Noel Woodbridge wrote an article that gives examples of strategies that could be used to practically develop a sustainable

sports ministry. Tim Tucker is affiliated with Ambassadors in Sport in Pretoria, South Africa and is involved in full-time sports ministry there, while Noel Woodbridge is affiliated with South African Theology Seminary in Johannesburg, South Africa. For an effective sports ministry in a particular culture, the authors suggest that the current circumstances of North Korean culture toward Christianity and sports be analyzed, and the history of their relationship to sports must be understood (Tucker and Woodbridge). These factors have already been researched and discussed in the previous chapters.

The systematic theology strategy analyzes the biblical themes and support for how to develop a sports ministry the biblical way. According to missionaries that do sports ministry in Azerbaijan, “To find a biblical basis for sports, you need to take scriptural concepts and principles and apply them to sport.” These missionaries have asked to remain anonymous for the reasons of personal safety. They go on to explain that

There are many principles in our spiritual lives that parallel our lives in sport (sport and spirit). Paul, in 1 Corinthians 9, challenges the Christian to follow the example of the athlete to strive for the crown that lasts, a challenge to commitment. The New Testament speaks to the various crowns that we are to pursue or strive for. The ‘victory’ that God brings to our lives is referenced over thirty times. (Anonymous)

The analogy of athletes striving for a crown and finishing the race parallels our purpose in life, which is to persevere in our commitment to Christ until our last day on earth when we are united with Christ in heaven. Most people will understand the sports analogies, which is why sports are a great method to use in presenting the Gospel.

The anonymous missionary continues, “Jesus often used a rural language that the people understood to express spiritual truth, and Paul does the same with using the international

language of the games writing to people with a Greek mindset.” Paul realized that sporting jargon is something the Greeks were able to fully understand, so he used it to build relationships, trust, and finally, to present the Good News of Jesus Christ. The missionary source explains that

Man has a general call (all to be fishers of men), then a personal call (called to be ministers, ambassadors), and finally a special call (the apostles had skills needed to do certain types of ministry). Approach to ministry is diverse and the pulpit or sphere of influence varies. And Paul encouraged those who were saved to stay where they were to continue what they were doing and to do it better than they did it before. (Anonymous)

He is saying that we must do our best at the special call that each individual person has from the Lord, in order to declare his glory. The missionaries were able to provide a sufficient biblical foundation that exemplifies how sports are a biblical means of doing ministry.

Now that sports ministry has a biblical basis, how to proceed in organizing a sports ministry in the dangerous country of North Korea becomes the imposing question. The regime is brutal and will put an end to anything that seems to threaten their nation and ideology in any way. As Dr. Houlihan has said, they are not rationale; they provide no reasoning for the actions they choose to take. They are not held to the same standards as a democracy and therefore, can do whatever they want without any obligations for an explanation. This frightening truth requires a sports ministry in North Korea to have extreme precautions for both the safety of the missionaries and the citizens participating in the ministry. For this reason, a sports ministry in North Korea will not be given a title that in any way alludes to being a religious ministry. The missionaries must be humanitarians working for the good of the North Korean regime and their Great Leader, not working for God and his Son, Jesus Christ.

There are several approaches that could be considered in the efforts to bring a basketball program to North Korea. However, due to Kim Jong Un's suspicion of the western world, it has to be carefully considered and developed. VICE Media brought Dennis Rodman a media campaign to penetrate a resistant country. Kim Jong Un, being an educated man, would have known the company's intentions for filming in North Korea would bring publicity to both parties and he must have known they were tempting him with basketball, yet he still took part in the exchange. VICE Media confesses "To get in, a liaison between North Korea and Vice suggested that the company donate basketball hoops and scoreboards to North Korean schools — a goodwill gesture of sorts at the beginning of discussions about a visit" (Stelter 13). A similar strategy could be initiated by giving gifts to North Korea in exchange for an opportunity to bring in humanitarian sports organizations. Westerners are well-known for their many humanitarian groups. Following VICE Media's method, a program could be developed that could offer North Korea an upgrade for their local parks and schools. This suggests that children will be more interested in basketball if better equipment would be in place for their enjoyment. Unlike soccer, the most popular world sport, basketball requires more equipment and a smooth playing surface. During the construction, camps can be organized from the communities and small leagues can be developed and instituted. This would be a bold attempt to get into the communities and meet the citizens.

When the missionary source asked what methods he uses to present the Gospel in a sports' atmosphere in Azerbaijan, he says,

We have used all methods, certainly the relationships that are formed in competition.

Personal testimony shared with your opponents. As coaches, the position of influence is great, the ability to speak to life issues with your players. The forming of various youth or

recreational leagues and the incorporation of ‘team times’ is a very natural opportunity. Presently, Joy and I are involved in coaching at various levels and then I also still play with a local team. (Anonymous)

The anonymous missionaries, however, have an advantage in that they can present the Gospel openly in the nation in which they minister through sports; but the methods they suggest are great for a communist nation as well.

The purpose of the ministry will be to build relationships with the North Korean citizens, soldiers, and even in the most unique cases, regime leaders and officials. The goal is to build trust among the citizens and people in leadership. Trust cannot be built by being compromised by trying to deviously preach the Gospel right away. The method the sports ministry will take is through a humanitarian approach. The sports ministry missionaries should exemplify every biblical value through their coaching and through the values taught by the sport. As Francis of Assisi’s famously says, “Preach the Gospel at all times, and when necessary, use words.” This is the phrase that missionaries must live by when doing sports ministry in North Korea. Missionaries must show the love of Christ and be the love of Christ if they wish to have a longstanding impact on any person in the nation. The missionaries must be who they proclaim to be: lovers of sports. Old’s ministry in Honduras is not termed a “Christian” organization, but his method to reaching the children for Christ is to always show the love of God through his actions (Old).

Sports evangelism was also used in the former Soviet Union behind the Iron Curtain. Ministries such as Athletes in Action used sports as an opportunity to witness in the communist nation. The anonymous missionary explains his involvement in the former Soviet Union and other current communist states. He says,

We traveled as Sports Outreach International. Global Sports Partners and AIA have been doing the same thing for years. We would organize various sporting teams and then travel with those teams for friendly competitions. Basketball, football, soccer hockey, etc. and most time, teams would have up to ten competitions per trip over the length of a month or in two or three cities. Players would invite teams that they played against throughout the week to a large week- end production usually one night. Other times, we would use the half-time to share a testimony about the game and a personal testimony about something even more important for two to three minutes. That often led to one on one time of sharing over a meal or tea. (Anonymous)

The anonymous missionary gives impeccable and experienced advice of how to incorporate the Gospel message into sports in communist nations. These ideas seem somewhat unrealistic to do in North Korea because of how strict and monitored the nationals are by the government and military. One might assume that these types of sports competitions and social exchanges may only be possible after the fall of the Kim family dynasty. He continues, “While the sport was the draw, we just used it to gain a platform to share the gospel either in a large setting or in a one on one/ two on two times. Sports are a great international language (tool) that opens the door for relationships and that is where God waits. Sharing what God has done for you and being a witness, is very powerful” (Anonymous).

Who would be the most effective people to be used in developing sports ministry in North Korea? North Koreans are taught to hate Americans, but it could be possible that using Americans would be valuable in showing the citizens their perceptions of Americans are incorrect because of lies they have been told concerning the United States. Incorporating Americans to work alongside North Koreans could be used as a people-to-people contact to

mitigate the negative mentality that North Koreans have had toward the US for so many years. However, according to Dr. Houlihan, the best hope for North Korea is from South Korea. The South understands the North to a much greater extent than any other people group in the world, because they are brothers and sisters from the same ancestry. They are also closest in proximity and have been studying the northern nation more and know more than anyone else about North Korean mindset and ideologies. However, having people from diverse nations and people groups could also have a unique influence on the citizens. They could see what different cultures have to offer each other and how they can be unified despite differences.

The target audience the sports ministry would be most likely to reach is young people. The nation of North Korea highly value their youth because their minds are so pliable. The Kim family targets young people in order to gain their support and blind commitment at a young age, so that they will be devoted to the regime and its leaders throughout their adulthood. Korea Today, a state-run magazine supports this claim, “Korean youth are ‘loved by the people as the flower of the country and the most attractive unit of society’” (Conway-Smith 5). The young people of North Korea are being taught how to devotedly follow their leader through the values taught by learning their dance performances for the Arirang. They are taught the values of a totalitarian state such as discipline, obedience, and love of the regime through dancing. If the sport of dance can be used for the regime, then it can also be used to teach biblical values as well in a non-threatening way. Conway-Smith continues saying that “There is an obsession with youth in this country. Young people are praised for their vitality, spirit, and fervent devotion to the leadership and ideology, and endless feats are attributed to them” (Conway-Smith 6). Everything children are taught in school is how to please their Great Leader, Kim. Young people are at a critical age, and it is very difficult to change an adult’s mindset and preconceived

notions; therefore, young people are an important audience to target, because they are in the critical years of being brainwashed by their regime leaders. Sports can also be used to empower women in a society in which they are heavily oppressed. According to Old, sports “can also be used to empower women around the world, who have no rights, so that they can feel good about themselves” (Old). Women in North Korea can be given a chance to feel their self-worth through exercise, the values given through sports, and through finding a purpose on a team. Overall, whether the target audience is young people or women, anyone who enthusiastically decides to join the recreational organization will be most willing to learn what the foreigners have to offer.

Sports work well as a ministry because they are used as a tool to perform the Great Commission; sports break through cultural barriers and bring unity among differing cultures, and they provide an opportunity for teaching life skills while developing leaders. Sports and athletes were created by God, so sports ministry must be used to worship God with his creation (Tucker and Woodbridge). According to Old, sports transcend most insignificant, unnecessary conflicts, “on the field, money doesn’t matter; what matters is what you do with that soccer ball, and that’s why sports can be used for peace building” (Old). Furthermore, the anonymous missionary states his opinion of having a sports ministry in North Korea,

[I] think it would work great having been involved in sports ministry since the late 80’s.

We have been involved in taking sports teams to the former Soviet Union and China since before the collapse of the “Iron Curtain”. Some of the challenges of sports ministry would be the same as any other area of ministry, doing what you do for the right reasons, and doing them with a high degree of excellence. (Anonymous)

Our hearts, motives, intentions, and goals must be made pure and aligned with that of Christ’s when creating a sports ministry in any environment. If ministries trust in the power of

relationships, and show the love of Christ through team sports, eventually people will start to ask questions.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

To follow up on Dennis Rodman's visit to North Korea, he befriended North Korean leader Kim Jung-Un, being one of the few Americans to have actually met Jung-Un. Vice Media organized an international basketball tournament for the North Koreans with the assistance of Rodman and three of the Harlem Globetrotters. In "A Rebound for Rodman," the journalists Doldo and Terwilliger claim that Dennis Rodman is performing an act of Ping-Pong diplomacy and has the potential to unite the United States and North Korea. According to Doldo Iv and Terwilliger, he used basketball diplomacy as a means of connecting with the citizens of North Korea and showing the people a more positive view of the West than what they have always been told. Rodman says, "We went there to do what we normally do, and that's to be cross-cultural ambassadors and use the game of basketball as a bridge for exchange" (Doldo Iv and Terwilliger). Vice co-founder Shane Smith describes how the staff talked about the visit to North Korea: "We said to ourselves, 'Well, if we go through normal channels, it's almost impossible to get in. But what if we put together a sort of exhibition basketball team to go over there?' It has been called "basketball diplomacy" in the press since Mr. Rodman and company arrived — 'and that was the actual idea'" (Stelter 10). Rodman's basketball diplomacy in North Korea suggests an excellent and effective strategy for Christian missions, one that has the potential to open a door into the heart of the North Korean regime.

Another possible chance of reaching North Korea is following Dennis Rodman's example and befriending Kim Jong Un strictly based on sports, like basketball. Daniel records that after King Nebuchadnezzar proclaimed that the God of Israel is the One, True God, he made his entire kingdom of Babylon worship God too. King Nebuchadnezzar strongly influenced a large portion of people in the Middle East. Another example is when Emperor Constantine of the

Roman Empire became a devout Christian, then legalized Christianity, and empowered the Roman Catholic Church. He decided he needed supernatural help outside of his army in order to rule his kingdom. He had seen how leaders who followed multiple gods always succumbed to failure with no aid from their gods; but then he observed that the One Supreme God had been faithful to His people and this is the God he chose to follow (“Christian History Institute”). The British historian Hugh Trevor-Roper, said, “Constantine exercised the greatest influence on western history of any man since Christ” (“Christian History Institute”). Additionally, as emperor of Rome, the Christianized Constantine outlawed infanticide, the abuse of slaves and peasants, the practice of crucifixion, and he made Sunday a day of rest (“Christian History Institute”). The examples of King Nebuchadnezzar and Emperor Constantine provide evidence supporting the idea that if Kim Jong Un is reached with the Gospel, the entire nation of North Korea could have the opportunity of knowing Jesus Christ almost immediately. However, this evidence causes us to question if Christianization would actually bring similar positive social change to the country of North Korea, and if Kim Jong-Un, with his passion for basketball, would be the pathway to that change? On another note, if Christian NBA players could be mobilized to use basketball to create opportunities for crossing boundaries and establishing people-to-people contact with North Koreans (and Kim Jung-On particularly), could the Hermit Kingdom of the world be coaxed out of its shell? The answers to these questions would determine if using Rodman’s approach for basketball ministry would influence Kim Jung Un like King Nebuchadnezzar and Emperor Constantine.

Of course, using sports as the platform for strategic missional initiative into North Korea could create new problems. The anonymous missionary explains that

Obstacles come for various reasons; perhaps some have a more George Orwellian take on things, 'real sport has nothing to do with fair play. It is bound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard of all rules and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence, in other words it is war minus the shooting.' To work in a communist culture where special favors are given to athletes and others that are gifted can be an obstacle as well. (Anonymous)

Furthermore, there is a school of thought that thinks the negatives outweigh the positives in sports diplomacy. Many sports fans believe that sports have spiritual powers that go beyond politics; therefore, sports should not be lowered for political use (Murray). Also, critics argue that politicians use sporting events for a photo-op and have no true common interest in the sport. The last argument is that diplomacy is promoting peace, while sports encourages competition, nationalism, and conflict to win, which makes sports-diplomacy contradictory and therefore, it does not work (Murray). In order for sports diplomacy to work, each side must respect and understand the significance and importance sport has in and of itself.

Further research that could continue to enhance the idea of using sports to penetrate the nation of North Korea with the Gospel should include studies of the negative outcomes of sports ministry in a society (specifically, a communist society). Research should also include obstacles that accompany sports ministry among differing age groups, such as children, teens, and men and women adults, and among differing ethnic groups. It is apparent that sports can have a positive impact on hostile nations and encourage hopeless, oppressed people groups. Each person interviewed about sports ministry insists that the most important aspect is building relationships; therefore, empowering relationships is the critical next step in any effort to positively impact the nationals of North Korea.

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