
What Christians Can Learn from Golf – or any Sport!

An article for the [Cathedral Times](#)
by the Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler,
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip

Okay, for years now, I have not been afraid to make a particular confession, an unusual one, one that not many Episcopal priests can make. I confess: I don't play golf.

But I know that golf is a great sport! And I know lots of good people who do play golf! So it was that I found myself watching some of the recent Masters Golf Tournament, in Augusta, Georgia, a few weeks ago. Being from Georgia, I have to watch the Masters anyway.

Some of you know what happened at this year's Masters. Jordan Spieth, a fan favorite, was playing splendid golf and had led pretty much the whole way; it looked as if he were bringing his game in for a perfect landing. Alas, on the last day, on a beautiful afternoon, he simply lost his touch, and his game collapsed (even I know that a quadruple-bogey is not good). Within the span of three holes and about thirty minutes, he had dropped out of first place, and he would not catch up. A great golfer (Danny Willett, the son of an Anglican priest!) won, but people may well remember the tournament because of the surprising and spectacular loss of Jordan Spieth.

The next day, I happened to be watching the 6 o'clock news on television. I was watching our local station WXIA, channel 11, in particular, because our Cathedral parishioner, Jeff Hullinger, was making his debut as co-anchor that night. He is a good man, and I have followed his sportscasting in this city for some time.

That evening, as he offered a short editorial-type piece, Jeff Hullinger addressed Spieth's loss with excellent grace. I want to repeat his remarks here, because they provide us all a graceful lesson about why we participate in any sport.

Jeff Hullinger said something like this: *"I have been a passionate sports fan since I was a toddler, and I have never been impacted by a sporting moment either in person or on television the way I was yesterday at Augusta. ... I was sitting in the stands at Amen Corner with my 13-year-old son right behind Jordan Spieth on number 12.*

Thousands went immediately quiet on his crash. As the ball bounded into Rae's Creek, it was like death. Silence. We followed Spieth after his 7 on the par 3 and watched him walk. Within 30 minutes, he lost a five stroke lead, and in the shadows of late afternoon was losing the event and losing history.

I told my son this; and as a mature man, I know this to be true. The most important moments in life are losing. Losing shapes us. It forms us—it defines who we are. I can remember my victories in life, but ... I feel every loss with my heart and my soul. Vince Lombardi had it wrong when he said "winning is an all the time thing." Losing is. And dealing with loss. Jordan Spieth is a metaphor today for any of us who have ever lost or lost in public and gotten back up to play again—and with more distance off the tee than we had before."

Hullinger was right. It is how we lose that defines us. I love sports, playing sports and watching sports, because I love the thrill of victory. It's wonderful to win! But we lose far more often. All of us lose far more often. That losing is important, indeed critical, to the spiritual life. It is how we acknowledge loss that defines our spirituality. It is how we acknowledge loss that defines our true self. When we grow into someone else through our loss, we are on our way to the kingdom of God.

Now... about our Atlanta Braves...



Sam Candler

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip



© The Cathedral of St. Philip. All rights reserved.