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BOOK REVIEWS

SACRED HOOPS: SPIRITUAL LESSONS OF A HARDWOOD WARRIOR

PHIL JACKSON
HYPERION, 1996
$14.95, 240 pages

Reviewed by Elizabeth Baker

Catholic school leaders, athletic directors, and coaches can benefit from reading *Sacred Hoops: Spiritual Lessons of a Hardwood Warrior*. The management tools that Jackson employs should be familiar to coaches who use spirituality to focus on success. Coaches and athletic directors are familiar with the rich traditions of spirituality which can enable a team to focus on a successful season. School leaders and coaches interested in the management and motivation of their student athletes should examine the leadership style of this successful coach.

At the end of the 2003 National Basketball Association (NBA) season, veteran coach Phil Jackson had again brought a team, the Los Angeles Lakers, to the championship game. The perennial success of this leader compels one to revisit Jackson's explanation of leadership in *Sacred Hoops: Spiritual Lessons of a Hardwood Warrior*. Motivated by a management style which couples the game of basketball with the journey of spirituality, Jackson attempts to account for his "crazy-quilt style of coaching" (p. 186).

Jackson emphasizes the selflessness and compassion he learned as a Christian of Pentecostal upbringing. The adults in his early childhood held sacred the tenets of Scripture and virtue. As a mature adult, Jackson sought to step away from the harshness of this religious upbringing to look at how other traditions view spirituality. In the process, Jackson was transitioning from playing college basketball to playing professional basketball to coaching professional basketball. The similarity between the aspirations and dreams of life and the search for a spiritual center were present throughout Jackson's journey.

Movement from player to coach was a learning step in Jackson's spiritual development. Although a slow process, including time spent as a player-coach, Jackson learned different leadership styles from each of his mentors. He also sought spiritual enlightenment in the form of reading materials.

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In particular, Jackson mentioned the influences of the books *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind, Black Elk Speaks*, and *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. Jackson also tried self-hypnosis, which he considered to be a powerful tool for his athletic success. Jackson was searching not only for knowledge about basketball strategy, but knowledge about life and its spiritual purpose.

Jackson's spiritual quest, which also included study in Buddhism and the practice of yoga, was still ongoing when he became a coach in the Continental Basketball Association and Superior Basketball League. The experience of working with talented coaches and mentors combined with a search for spirituality prepared Jackson for success in the NBA. In particular, Jackson's coaching mentors included Bill Fitch, who taught "his trademark full-court defense" (p. 33), Red Holzman, who offered to Jackson that "the power of We is stronger than the power of Me" (p. 35) and Tex Winter, "the professor of basketball" (p. 86) who offered help to Jackson in formulating the triangle offense of three posts. Jackson wisely sought the counsel of good mentors to help him improve in the realm of basketball.

In 1989, Phil Jackson was named the head coach of the Chicago Bulls. Jackson had spent many years in preparation, developing a successful management style of coaching. Jackson was also exploring many different avenues of spiritual practices, reflected in his coaching and leadership style. Jackson wanted to lead his team with the sense that "vision is the source of leadership, the expansive dream state where everything begins and all is possible" (p. 98). Jackson knew that using the "Winter's system" and nurturing a player's "concept of selflessness" (p. 99) through the use of spiritual techniques would insure the Chicago Bulls' success.

As a leader of a team, he believed that "selflessness is the soul of teamwork" (p. 6). Jackson's visionary style was "values-based," meaning that he first must "enlist the hearts and minds of the follower" (p. 153) to see the dream. In this case, the dream is first a team effort in learning offense and defense. The goal of winning is secondary. Jackson also knew that people are "motivated by love" (p. 79) and therefore created a supportive environment for his team. Examples of the support provided to the team included a meticulous approach in practicing repetitive drills in order to learn the game and an articulation of the dream of winning. He also supported the team by "giving the players the freedom to find out what worked and what did not work. That meant putting them out on the floor together in unusual combinations and letting them deal with treacherous situations without bailing them out" (p. 106). Jackson felt that this support helped the team find success in real game situations.

One approach that Jackson used was to look at basketball with the eyes of a spiritual leader. In order for players to realize their potential, Jackson felt

that "players need to connect with something larger than themselves" (p. 64). Jackson called this connection "mindfulness" (p. 118) or "being fully present in every moment" (p. 4). Jackson called on all teammates, coaches, and support staff to be fully present during game situations. Players then "develop an intuitive feel for how their movements and those of everyone else on the floor are interconnected" (p. 91). Jackson knew that for this feeling to happen "it must be owned by every single member of the group" (p. 100). Jackson had to turn the team into "dreamers to expand their vision of what they could become" (p. 105). Jackson felt that one way to develop this sense of clarity of vision was to share with them the Lakota war chant, hanta yo, which means "the spirit goes ahead of us" (p. 112). Jackson was beginning to share a personal spirituality with the team.

To attain a sense of spirituality, Jackson used a "crazy-quilt" (p. 186) approach mixing different philosophies of religion and spirituality to create for himself and the teams a "stillness of mind" (p. 117). Through Zen practices, meditation, and a study of Lakota Native American warrior ways, Jackson personally and professionally created a leadership style rooted in a "sacred quest" (p. 12). From creating a Lakota themed room for team meetings to relating Taoist principles of "yielding to an opponent's force in order to render him powerless" (p. 136) to basketball, Jackson tried to help individual players attain a "subtle shift in consciousness" (p. 91). The text achieves Jackson's goal of showing the link between the spirit of a player and the performance of a team. Jackson's strong leadership and strategies for creating championship teams continues to succeed year after year.

Catholic educational leaders, athletic directors, and coaches could benefit from the advice given by Jackson about management style. Unfortunately, the goal of being centered and mindful is disconcerting because of the eclectic variety of methods used by Jackson to attain this spirituality. As Catholics, centeredness comes from sacraments, especially in the Eucharist. Our traditions of prayer become our foundation. To pick and choose one religious practice from one tradition and merge it with many others from other traditions is not only confusing but also takes away from the vision. Jackson mentions that some teammates practice visualization while other choose not to. Michael Jordan maintains that "he didn't need any of that Zen stuff" (p. 174). Principals and those involved in athletics, whether athletic directors or coaches, should remember that team members, whether faculty members, students, or players, do have a need to find centeredness in their respective roles. Often teams participate in liturgies or prayer services to prepare themselves for a game. Faculties attend retreats each year. Prayer is prevalent in Catholic athletic activities. The power of Jackson's message reminds us to keep focus as part of our winning strategies whether in the classroom or coaching our teams to victory. Our Catholic heritage tells us that the focus

should be on Christ.

Catholic educational leaders have a call to promote the faith development of a faculty or a team. Jackson's management style, concentrating on vision and teamwork, is powerful and has proven successful. As leaders, the use of these tools to achieve autonomy and focus are lofty goals shown to be attainable by Jackson, and Catholic religious practices and traditions centered in Christ can act as a comforter to replace the "crazy-quilt" (p. 186) spirituality Jackson uses to motivate winning teams.

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THE SCHOOLS WE NEED AND WHY WE DON'T HAVE THEM

E. D. HIRSCH, JR.
ANCHOR BOOKS, 1996
$15.95, 317 pages

Reviewed by Daniel Tully

Across the nation, workshops, professional development seminars, and college courses are teaching educators to use inquiry learning, cooperative learning, hands-on learning, discovery learning, and constructive techniques to educate their students. The current emphasis on pedagogy is in teaching students how to learn how to learn. Teachers are called facilitators and moderators and any notion of rote learning or memorization is largely frowned upon. It is against this educational backdrop that Hirsch intends to bring about a renewed emphasis on content–based learning in schools in *The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them*.

With failing schools across the country, especially in minority and lower socio-economic neighborhoods, the problem of inadequate education is widespread. The reason, according to Hirsch, is not because of diversity, socio-economic status, or creativity in the classroom, but rather the fault lies with European Romantic-era beliefs ushered in during the 19th century. For