

The Worship of Football in Nigeria

by

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Abstract

Football, from its inception in Nigeria, has occupied a pivotal position in the hearts of many people. A great multitude of fans now follows the games with great passion that life becomes almost meaningless to them without it. The contemporary followership of the sport among Nigerian youths exceeds a mere thirst for entertainment and assumes every form of what religion represents. Several Nigerian youths look forward to the weekend for football matches rather than religious attendance in Churches, while every day of the week never ends without some football-related rituals. This paper, therefore, proposes to study the spiritual dynamics of modern football and its influences on everyday life and the religious commitment of the Nigerian youths to it. It discusses the other aspects of the game and encourages the capacity for society to respond to it to create positive impacts in the lives of the youths. The paper draws its data from interactions and observation of the practices of Nigerian professional footballers and its community of fans. It highlights the observable worship of the game as being attributable to the massive similarities that exist between football and religion which the former combines with greater entertaining passion and social candour. It therefore suggests that religions in Nigeria should embrace football as a channel of achieving religious harmony as this would combine the appeal of the game with religious guidance to curb the behavioural responses that are devoid of spiritual and religious virtues.

Key Words: Worship, Football, Spirituality, Nigeria

Introduction

In multitudes, they throng into the complex dressed in sacred and hallowed uniform apparel. They came to be led into the experience by the dedicated souls who have used the preceding days preparing and aspiring towards a happy and victorious gathering. The group gathered in hope of returning home with lifted spirits and renewed devotion. Many other communes with the group remotely in the gathering of home cells or a date with the media broadcast. Various forms of rituals ensued across the group's universe, and in unison of spirit, faces are lifted in supplication for triumph over challenges. All souls present witnessed and hailed the leaders making ingress into the zone of subliminal bliss, the kind of experience that transcends barriers and transmits the euphoria of conquest all through the community...

The sort of expression above resonates in two similar but distinct Nigerian environments; it could be that of a religious gathering or sporting event, especially football. This represents a snippet of the similarities that exist between sporting events and religious worships. This parallelism is hinged on the comparability of several themes like stadia being compared to the cathedral, players to worship leaders, jerseys and club merchandise to robes and other religious objects, the game rules to liturgies and doctrines, and the fans as the religious congregation. With all these similitudes, the comparison of sport and religious experiences becomes glaring all anyone to comprehend.

At the turn of the century, there arose a new awakening into the interplay between religion and sport, especially in the Western part of the globe, which fuelled some academic curiosities into the interaction between these two phenomena. Football, as a sport is a great aspect of the contemporary world where many fans expend massive time and monetary resources on the passion they have for the game. Its relevance transcends mere entertainment to that of recreating the symbolic cosmic struggle of humans (Gordon and Rob, 2009). In