

OUR ROLE in the WORLD of SPORT MINISTRY

Introduction

The goal and focus of this study is to help you understand the broad spectrum of ministry that can be included in what we call Sports ministry. This includes evangelism **to** the sports world and evangelism **through** the sports world. It also includes discipleship **to** and **through** the sports world. Once you get an understanding of how broad the ministries can be, you need to understand the more specific calling and vision of Athletes in Action. We want to help you see where AIA distinctives and calling “fit” in to the world-wide sport movement.

The Sports Ministry Map: A Tool to Help us Understand the Breadth of Sport Ministry Worldwide

A map can have two purposes. One, it gives you a visual picture of where you are. Two, it can show you how to get somewhere else. The Sports Ministry Map can give us a visual picture of the broad spectrum of sport ministry. It will also help us decide where we need to “go” as we begin AIA ministries in our various countries.

The Sports Ministry Map also helps a ministry leader set boundaries for their ministry within the large context of sport ministry possibilities. It helps us to keep our focus on our particular target audience.

The Sports Ministry Map has two axes.

The first is a horizontal axis which allows people to be identified where they are in their personal experience with sport. It also allows for a sport ministry to determine the audience that they wish to reach within the sporting world.

The second axis, which is vertical, is the Engel’s scale. It demonstrates the spiritual journey that people are on as they progress from little knowledge of God on to salvation and growth in Christ.

Recommended Reading:

The Sports Ministry Map was developed by Lowrie McCown. You can read more about the map in *Focus on Sport in Ministry* by Lowrie and Valerie Gin, available at www.360sports.net

The Various Audiences in Sports Ministry

This first axis describes the range of people who have an interest or who participate in sport. It refers more to their own mindset toward sport and their perspective to sport rather than just their ability.



The Spectator

These people are involved in sport through other peoples’ experience. By attending games, watching them on TV, listening to the radio or reading the newspaper, the spectator is involved in sport. They are the largest grouping of people that a sport ministry can reach out to or disciple.

Outreach idea for the spectator:

High profile athletes speaking at an event, through a video or an interview, about their faith in Christ.

The Novice Athlete

The Novice is new to the game and is just developing skills in a sport or sports. They might be a child who has few skills and experience.

Outreach idea for the Novice:

A program or “Camp” that offers skill development or instruction given by Christian athletes who also share a testimony or give a Gospel presentation.

The Leisure Athlete

These athletes compete for fun. They are competitive but participation in the sport is more important to them, than the results or their performance.

Outreach idea to the Leisure Athlete:

A Church could sponsor a team in a recreation league, or could host a league in their gym or on their fields. Church members could join a recreation league in order to have ministry to the participants.

The next 3 categories of athletes are much more serious in their participation and purpose of sport. Their identity is connected to their sport experience. Often their participation in sport helps to define their lives.

The “Player”

The “player” takes sport to a higher level in life - they train, watch their diet, they find their personal identity in sport. They are highly motivated by their performance and very competitive. Winning and their personal performance is important to them. They are willing to make personal sacrifices in order to improve their performance.

Outreach and Ministry Ideas to “Players”:

A Sport ministry that offers players help in developing the spiritual dimension of their lives.

Discipleship to players help them to broaden their identity, basing it on who they are in Christ and not on their competition.

The Elite Athlete

The Elite Athletes may not be the top player in the town or country, but they are getting benefits from the sport, such as scholarships, government funding, professional salaries, housing, travel, etc. They are identified by the community through their sport. They have a deeper understanding and commitment to the sacrifices, risks and fears that are involved in the world of sport. Sport is often the first priority of their lives and all other experiences or choices in life are filtered through their sport experience.

Outreach and Ministry Ideas to Elite Athletes:

They need a sport ministry or minister that is committed to them and to the elite ministry for the long haul. It takes time, effort and love before these athletes will open up and trust you.

Evangelism is possible when the athletes discover that sport is not meeting all the needs that they hoped it would.

Discipleship should help them discover who they are in Christ, growth in Christ as the one to build their lives on, and the vision of utilizing their platform as an elite athlete to reach others for Christ.



OUR ROLE in the WORLD of SPORT MINISTRY (continued)

The High Profile Athlete

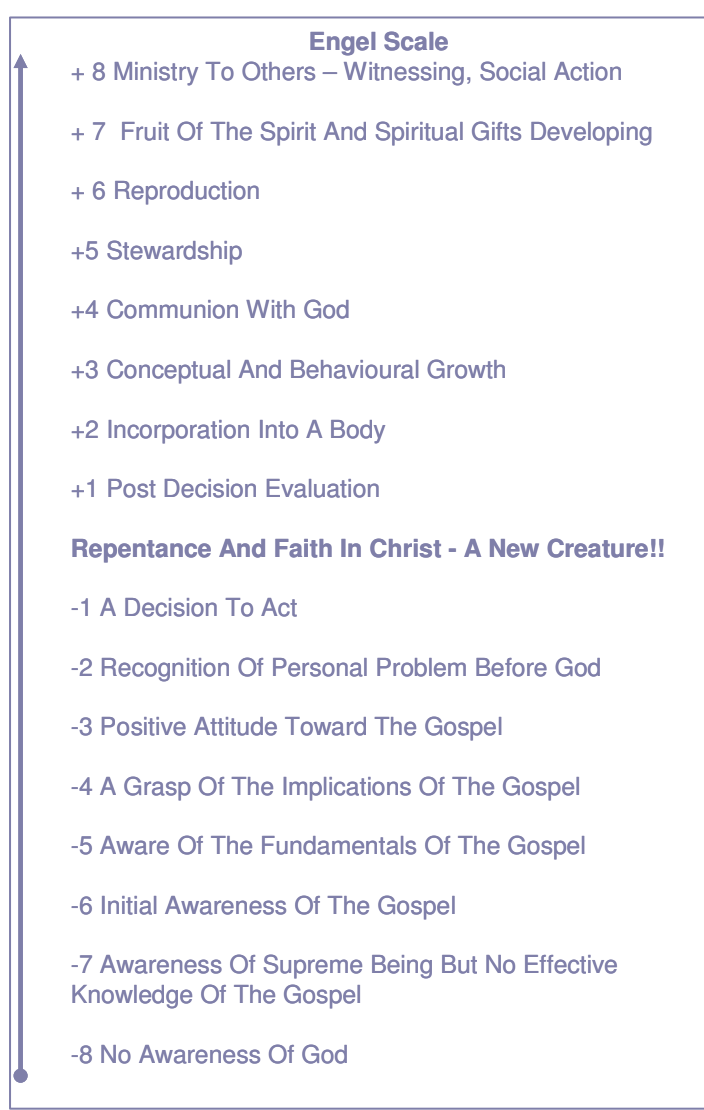
There are very few high profile athletes within a sport, city or nation. Often, in their society, there are no rules for them and they are treated almost like gods. They have celebrity status and, because of their status in the world of sport, they have lost much of their private life.

Outreach and Ministry Ideas to High Profile Athletes:

Ministry to them is often slow, disjointed and interrupted because of the incredible pressure on their time and schedule. It will also take time to earn their trust as so many other people are approaching them for their time, talent and finances.

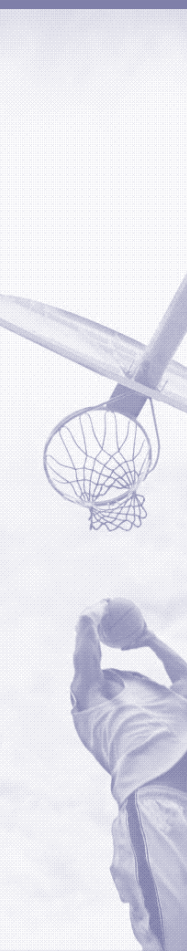
They can become “spokes people” for your outreach ministry to the fans or other athletes but you must be aware of the risks.

The Spiritual Condition of Your Audience: The Engel Scale



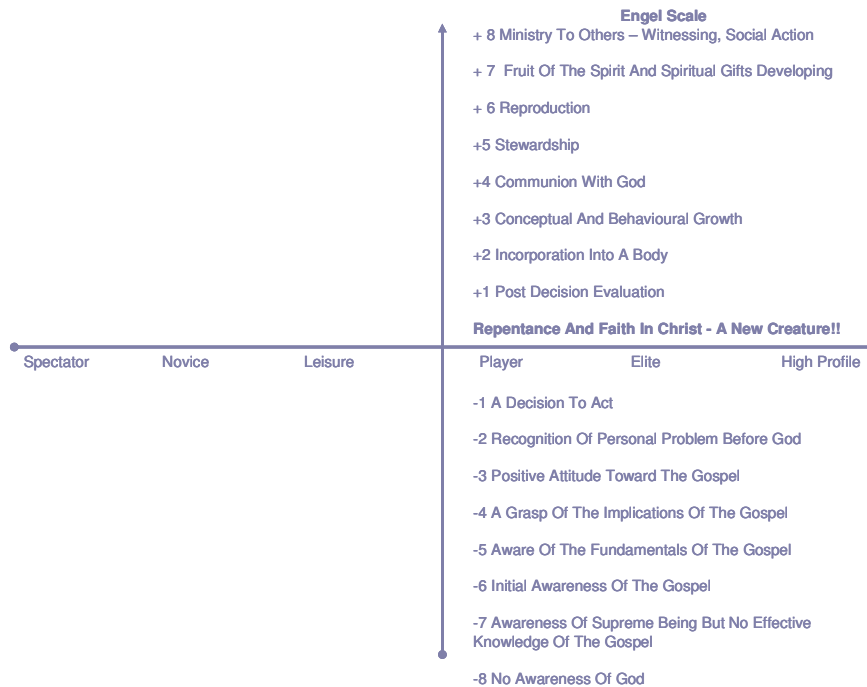
Every person in the world is on a spiritual journey. They are either progressing toward God or retreating from Him. Once a person comes to Christ they continue on that journey, growing in their relationship with their God and Savior.

The Vertical axis of the Sports Ministry Map charts the progress of a person from someone who has very little or no knowledge of God, increasing in their knowledge of Him and the implications of the Gospel. Once the person comes to Christ then the Engel's scale charts their spiritual progress.



Sport in Ministry Map: Combining the Two Axis

When we combine the horizontal axis of sport ministry opportunities with the vertical axis of the Engel's scale we have the Sports Ministry Map. We can begin to see the vast and wide variety of possible sport ministries. Sports ministry includes evangelism to those interested in sports all the way to evangelism to those involved in sport. It also includes the discipleship of these two broad audiences.



AIA Distinctives: Where Do We Belong on the Map?

The goal of this section is to encourage you to begin an evangelistic ministry with athletes and officials in the “elite” and “high profile” category. A discipleship ministry with Christians in those categories would also be stressed. Once the ministry has established good relationships with people in those categories then they can be encouraged and trained to utilize their platform to reach out to those people who are fans of sport or interested in sport.

We can see that the Sport Ministry Map has four main areas of ministry. There are two areas of evangelism and two areas of discipleship. First, we can evangelize through the platform of sport to the fans of sport. Secondly, we can evangelize to the athletes, coaches and support staff who are the people of sport.

In discipleship, we can help the fans of sport and we can help the people in sport.

It would be difficult for one group to try and do all these kinds of ministry. Your ministry would have to be very large and have lots of staff and volunteers.

We, in Athletes in Action, believe that we are primarily called to evangelize the people of sport (Quadrant 2). Once elite and high profile athletes become Christians we also want to have a ministry of discipleship to the people of sport (Quadrant 4).

Since elite and high profile athletes are popular in every country, the next step would be to utilize the platform of those athletes to evangelize the fans for sport (Quadrant 1).

See diagram on the following page

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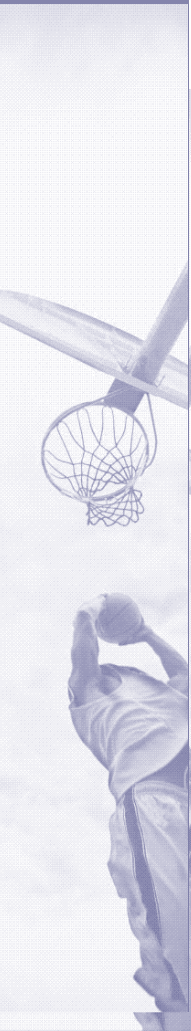
Application: Where do I Begin the AIA Ministry in My Country?

The first step is to identify the elite and high profile sports and athletes in your country. Is there a university system of sport, an elite club system, or professional leagues? What are the most popular sports? In what sports does your country do well internationally or at the Olympic Games?

Who are the people in Quadrant 2 in your country? This is where you want to begin an AIA ministry.

Secondly, if you meet Christians who are elite or high profile athletes or you begin to lead some of the athletes to Christ, you offer to disciple them. You want to help them grow in their faith, walk with God and expand their vision for ministry. This is working in Quadrant 4.

Once you have mature believers from that area of sport, you then begin to challenge, train and give them opportunities to share their faith with the sport fans of your nation. This is reaching out to Quadrant 1.



Engel Scale

This helpful model depicts the roles of God, the communicator and the listener in the process of communicating the Gospel. Everyone we talk to falls somewhere on this scale in terms of his spiritual decision-making process and receptivity to the Gospel.

This scale is helpful to us as communicators of the Gospel in four ways:

First, it shows us that apart from the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit, no listener can understand or respond to the Gospel. Only the Spirit can neutralize the spiritual noise caused by Satan's blinding and binding efforts and free the listener to appreciate the grace and truth of the Gospel.

Second, it shows that the Spirit of God and the communicator work in harmony to bring the listener to an understanding of the Gospel and to the point of personal decision. As Hendrick Kraemer points out, "The communication of the Gospel, which is necessarily incumbent upon the church and its members, is neither primarily nor ultimately dependent on our human ability to communicate." Kraemer maintains that we are called to a constant sharpening of our skills, but "the primary author of the effective transmission of the message is the Holy Spirit," the invisible third partner in the communication process. Without His witness, ours is futile. But with His witness, ours can be a tool in His powerful hand to effect spiritual results in the life of the listener.

Third, this chart shows us that different people have different levels of spiritual understanding and interest in the Gospel. While some are ready to respond today, some are not. While many are ready to take the next step toward accepting Christ, some are stalled in their decision-making process or are headed away from Christ.

Fourth, this chart gives us insight into the sequence of decision steps that lead to the actual event of conversion/regeneration. The listener must have an awareness of the fundamentals of the Gospel before he can grasp its personal implications, and he must grasp those implications before he can recognize his problem.

