

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

The Seventy

47 East South Temple Street, Salt Lake City, Utah 84150

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Dear fellow Varsity Scouts:

This summer we will celebrate the 100th anniversary of the modern Olympic games. In Atlanta, Georgia, in a new stadium filled with thousands of sports fans, the games will begin with the traditional parade of athletes. The Greeks will march first, an honor they always receive because they started the games. Other national athletes follow in alphabetical order, except for the Americans who, as hosts, will march last. Hundreds of pigeons will be released to symbolize the spirit of peace. Cannons will roar. Then a runner, bearing a torch that was lit originally by the rays of the sun in Olympia, Greece, will run into the stadium, circle the track, and ignite the Olympic flame. The Olympic flag will fly overhead, its five interlocking rings of blue, yellow, black, green, and red set against a white background symbolizing the friendship of people of all lands. And the Olympic motto, embossed on every medal won during the games, underlines what the Olympics are all about. Written in Latin, the motto is only three words long: "CITIUS, ALTIUS, FORTIUS." In English, these words translate to "Swifter, higher, stronger." These words denote man's eternal quest for improvement. How well we are living by this motto is attested by the sports records.

In the 1920s Johnny Weissmuller was called the greatest swimmer in history. Today, his world records are being broken by teenage girls.

For years, it was felt that the four minute mile was the ultimate for man. Again and again, athletes broke themselves in vain to better that time until Roger Bannister, an English medical student, shattered the traditional belief in man's limited capacity in the early 1950s. Since then, dozens of men, and boys, have bettered the four minute mark for the mile.

The ultimate for the shot put was supposed to be 60 feet. Parry O'Brien ended that myth in the Olympics of 1956. Now, these strong armed athletes are pushing that heavy shot past 70 feet.

At the first modern day Olympics held in 1896, the gold medal winner threw the discus 95 feet 7.5 inches. The world record today is close to 250 feet.

When I was young, Bob Richards pole vaulted 15 feet. That record seemed to be safe for years. Yet, today, if the vaulter cannot get over the bar above 19 feet he has no chance for a medal.

The records speak for themselves. As the years go on, we demonstrate man's eternal quest for perfection. And the performances of our athletes really make the words of the Olympic motto "Citius! Altius! Fortius!" come to life. Which causes us to consider--what makes a champion? What produces the athlete who stands on the top step of the victory pedestal to receive the gold medal? What drives an individual to run swifter, soar higher, demonstrate more strength than anyone has exhibited before?

My beloved young brethren, you of this royal generation, I submit to you that the same qualities that make the Olympic gold medal winner are the same that make a champion in any endeavor in life.

1. The white hot burning desire to succeed.
Roger Bannister described it as "the ability to take more out of yourself than you've got!"

2. Your individual effort.
After all is said and done, nothing works unless you do.
3. Faith in yourself.
It has been said that world records are made before the race is run.
4. Discipline.
Cut out of your lives the things which keep you from doing your best.
5. Honesty.
In ancient Greece, an athlete who cheated had to build a statue of himself at the foot of Mt. Kronius. The statues, inscribing the name of the cheater, and his offense, were called Zanes. There were only 13 Zanes built in over a thousand years.
6. Expect failures as you go.
It is impossible to live life without failing at something.
7. Learn to take defeat and bounce back to victory.
Human beings have a largely untapped comeback capacity.
8. Faith in God.
"Lord, you pick them up and I'll lay them down," prayed Gil Dodds, an American miler when he came to that moment of absolute fatigue, pain, and agony in a crucial race.

Although most of you will never participate in an Olympics, that Olympic motto should have deep significance for young Latter-day Saints who believe in a plan of eternal progression.

As you climbed your mountain today you exhibited many of these qualities of a champion. This accomplishment, and your own belief in your eternal worth and destiny, should provide the motivation to strive constantly to improve your performance in all aspects of your lives.

CITIUS! ALTIUS! FORTIUS!

With faith in your bright future,



Robert L. Backman
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and former Young Men's President