

Safe from sports injuries

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Do loads of sunshine and an outdoor life help to make Australian sportsmen and women highly competitive – and famous? We Australians like to think of ourselves as a force to be reckoned with in cricket and rugby. We celebrate our athletes' triumphs in the Olympics – especially in swimming. And we're proud when our tennis stars have their names engraved on the trophies at the French, Wimbledon, and US Open championships.

Each summer down here, I enjoy watching the Australian Open tennis tournament at Melbourne Park on TV. I admire the stamina, agility, and skill it takes to play the game at a high level. This year, however, we saw an unusually large number of on-court injuries.

When these incidents happened, it came to me that I could pray about them. I remembered that God cares for all His children. He keeps them safe. No one could fall out of God's care. I really tried not to accept that injuries are a normal part of sport, as one player asserted that they are during a TV interview.

The Bible says that God made us in His likeness (see Gen. 1:26,27). For me, this means that He has made each of us whole and well. Why, then, shouldn't people expect good health and safety to be natural? Whether we take part in sports or not, as His sons and daughters, we have the spiritual capacity to be agile, to run, walk, and move freely – and we can't lose that capability through age or accident.

Here's an example of how I handled injury at a time when my neighbor asked me to go jogging with her. At first I said I couldn't. I hadn't run since I was a kid. But she wouldn't take no for an answer, so I agreed to join her every afternoon – on a trial basis. The first time we went out, we barely made it around the block in our hilly neighbourhood. I'm not sure about her, but I thought I was nuts! Pretty soon I learned that if I was going to continue, I needed to pray beforehand.

At first my prayer was, "Dear Father, just get me through this experience. I'm trying to be good to my neighbor because she doesn't want to do this alone." Then my prayers moved up a notch. I recognized that I had stamina and vigor from God. He was giving me the ability to tackle and enjoy the runs. I couldn't be exhausted, hurt myself, or suffer from this activity. I was expressing God, who is the source of all life and strength. He would care for me.

After a number of weeks, by which time we'd graduated to longer distances, my neighbor started to complain about all kinds of discomfort – terrible pain, a stitch in her side, a sore heel, an inflamed ankle, aching calf muscles. I'm grateful to say I was fine. Each time as I jogged, I kept praying.

One day when my running companion was again doubled over in pain, she said to me, "How come you never get injured or complain?" I told her that I prayed, and that I honestly felt this either stopped me from being hurt or fixed me quickly if I was. "Oh good," she said. "Will you pray for me, too?" Which I did, in the same way that I prayed for myself. Gradually her woes lessened, until they stopped altogether. We ran together for several years until I moved house, and she went on to compete by herself in many road races in the community, which we call "fun-runs."

Injuries are reported widely in many sports such as football, skiing, hockey, and motor racing. Participants and fans alike can contribute to the solution through individual prayer. God's laws of health and harmony apply to all activity, and with His help everyone can stay safe and well.