

Sports and Joy

Sportmeet for a United World

By EMILIE CHRISTY

THE WORLD OF SPORTS FOR YEARS now has been characterized by commercialization, use of drugs to enhance performance and, at times, violence. And yet, paradoxically it holds a key to health, happiness and a witness to faith and Christian values. Recognizing this, many people and organizations are capitalizing on the riches that are found within this world that can be spread about and contribute to a better life, a more harmonious world and unity among all peoples.

Inspired by the Athens Olympics in 2004, Pope John Paul II, himself an athlete, also saw the importance of establishing the "Church and Sport" section of the Pontifical Council for the Laity in 2004. Its first international seminar was held in November 2005 with the hope of identifying priorities of need in the renewal of the field of sports.

Another group, *SportsLeader*, was initiated by a former Ohio State football player, Joe Lukens, who recognized that sports and coaches can play a pivotal role in the virtuous development of young men and women. With the help of two priests from the Legionaries of Christ, this new organization was born and continues its mission to provide programs, support and networking throughout all levels of sports that are changing lives on and off the field.

Sportmeet for a United World, one of the expressions of spiritual and social renewal stemming from the Focolare Movement, is also making a significant contribution in this field. Its primary commitment is to promote a culture in the world of sports that contributes to universal brotherhood among individuals, nations, cultures, ethnic groups and religions based on the "Golden Rule"—"Do

to others as you would have them do to you" (Lk 6:31).

The Light Behind Sportmeet

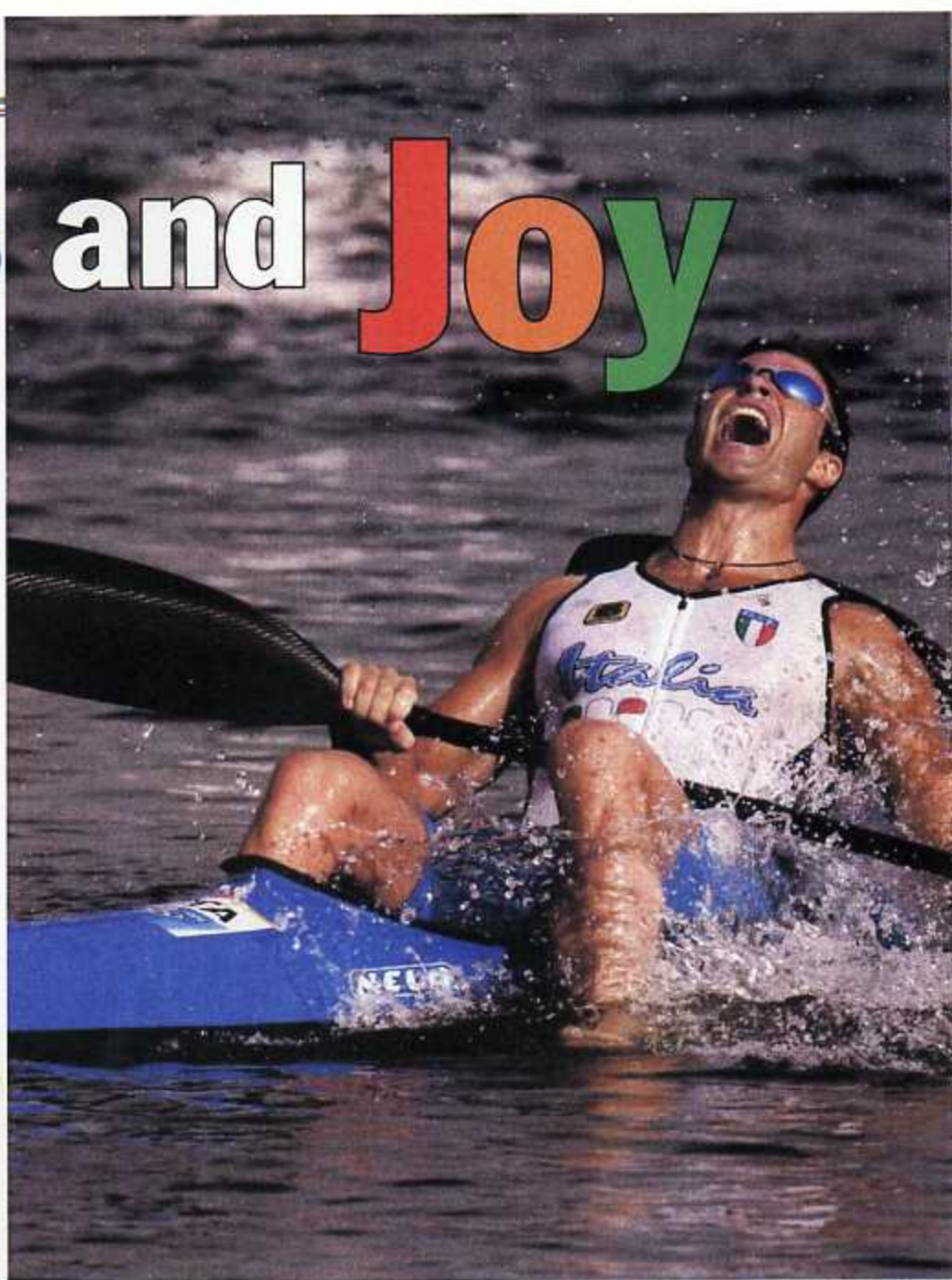
"Have you ever experienced thirst for the infinite?" Focolare founder Chiara Lubich wrote. "Have you ever felt in your heart the great wish to embrace what is boundless? Or have you ever experienced deep down inside you a sense of dissatisfaction with what you do or what you are? If this is so, you would be happy to find a formula for life that satisfies you fully, that would prevent you from having to look back on days gone by with regret...."

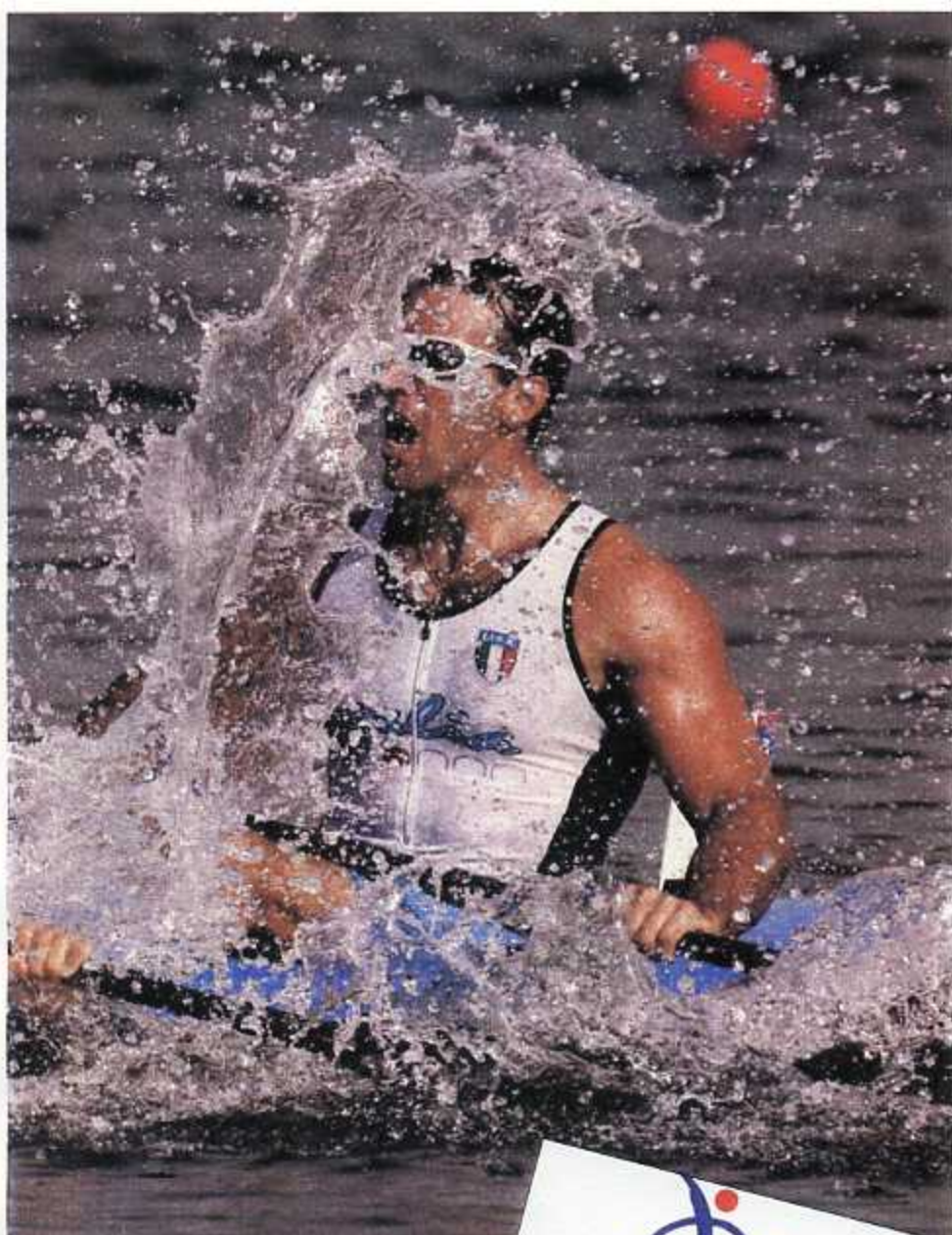
"In the Gospel there is a passage that makes us stop and think, and as soon as

we understand even just a little bit of it, we feel happy. It contains all that we have to do in life: 'Do to others as you would have them do to you.'

"This is the way to love each person we meet during the day. A day spent in this way makes life worth living. At the end of the day we will not recognize ourselves. We will experience a fullness of joy we have never felt before."

In this light *Sportmeet*, a network of athletes of all ages and ethnic backgrounds, through formation courses and national and international conferences, promotes ideas, studies, projects and experiences for those who share this spirit. The first of these Congresses was held





Winners of the Silver Medal in Canoe-Kayak at the 2004 Olympics in Athens



Iva Berasi, Trent city councillor for sports and special events, addressing the third Sportmeet international congress.

in 2003 focusing on the theme, "From a culture of defeat to a culture of victory" and in 2004, "Educate yourself and others through sport." In May 2005 a round table conference was held at the United Nations Headquarters in Switzerland was held and in October 2005 Run4Unity, a worldwide relay race promoted by Young for Unity of the Focolare Movement, sowed seeds of peace during 24 hours of sports, one for each time zone in the world.

Sports, Joy, and Goals Greater than Games

During the United Nations 2005 International Year for Sports and Physical Education, *Sportmeet* organized an international congress entitled: "Sports & Joy—Real Sport Runs Together With Joy" in September 2005 in Trent, Italy. The aim of the congress was to bring those in the world of sports into a dialogue focusing on the relationship between the playing of sports and joy. Persons around the world who study the social aspect of sports together with athletes, educators, instructors, coaches, doctors and other health practitioners, psychologists, journalists and those who work in this field participated in three days of reflection and exchange of experiences presented through reports, skillful lessons, research studies and workshops. The underlying hope is that further study and dialogue will be inspired by the presentations at the congress. In upcoming issues we will publish excerpts from various talks in order to contribute to this endeavor.

Sportmeet stands beside others in the social field who support the growth of the seeds of a "culture of giving" which sustains the building of universal brotherhood in today's society.



Learn more by visiting www.sportmeet.org

Upcoming issues will feature excerpts from talks given by sociologist Vera Araujo; economist Luigino Bruni; Michael Kleiner, Head of the UN Office of the International Year of Sports and Physical Education; Paolo Crepez, MD, President of Sportmeet; and P. Kevin Lixey, Pontifical Council for the Laity Office of Sports. Themes will include: *Global Society and Joy; the Paradox of Happiness; Achieving the Objectives of the United Nations through Sports; Sports as a Means of the Integral Formation of the Human Person.*