SASNOC Samoan Sports Awards

Keynote Speech
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What is honesty and integrity in sport? Good sportsmanship? Or, admitting that you want to win at any cost?…

The Olympic Creed, "Swifter, Higher, Stronger" denotes the pursuit of human excellence in sport. Technological advancement has afforded us sporting achievements beyond our imaginations. Figure hugging swimming gear are specially designed to minimise resistance through water. Special athletic shoes are designed for better cushion and spring. Body hugging rugby jerseys are designed to increase the body's cooling capacity therefore increasing endurance. Dietary supplements and regimen are used to assist with metabolic rates and maintaining a healthy body. All of these things are aimed at enhancing the athlete's natural sporting abilities.

In sport, technological advancement also include improvements to equipment that help to analyse and perfect body movements to allow for maximum athletic power, strength, distance, agility, speed and endurance. All these improvements improve the body and mind but not necessarily the spirit. There is no better illustration of the absence of spirit than the sad tale of eminent sports women and men owning up to taking performance enhancing drugs.

Some say that sport today is no longer about passion or love for the game; it is more about industry and winning at all costs. Love for the game is for some second to filling stadium seats and keeping people employed. Today in the world of professional sport to lose a game does not only affect the athlete or players, it can also affect whole groups of people – from team management through to those who are contracted to pick up rubbish at the rugby stands or tend to putting greens. This new professional sporting environment challenges traditional sporting ethics.

When Robbie Deans was asked his opinion as to why the All Blacks lost the quarter finals at the World Cup, he said, "…in the end it is about the spirit".

Sport in ancient Samoan times was a pursuit of balance between the mind, body and spirit. The regimen of the sports people of old required strict adherence to a dietary, physical, mental and spiritual regime. The Greek ideal of the Olympics was the same. It is not by accident that Samoans per head of population do well internationally in gridiron, rugby union, netball, boxing and rugby league. It attests to centuries of nurturing not only a regime but a culture of sports.

The search for meaning in the context of sport is no different to the search for meaning or *tofa sa'ili* in other spheres of life.

I have just been through a challenging task of trying to determine a contentious political issue. I see my search for *tofa sa'ili* here no different to that of the rugby referee who is calling out to the video referee: "is there any reason why I can't

award a try?”. In the end as Robbie Deans says, the essence is about the spirit – the spirit which sustains commitment, honesty, integrity and fairness.

God Bless.