

The Old Paths

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“Blunder Costs Dutch Skater Gold Medal”

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So said a news report on Tuesday (2/23/10). Sven Kramer, a Dutch speed skater who finished in first place, a full four seconds ahead of his next competitor, actually lost his race! Not only did he not get a gold medal, he did not get any medal at all! Instead, he was disqualified (“DQ”).

What happened? How could the fastest competitor lose the race? Simply put, at lap 17 (of 25), he failed to properly switch lanes! A fuller explanation follows:

“In ... speedskating, the competitors switch lanes each time they go down the backstretch to even up the distance they cover. As Kramer approached the cone that divides the two lanes, Kemkers (Sven Kramer’s coach, JJ) motioned furiously for him to shift to the inside. Kramer knew he was supposed to go outside -- he already was heading in that direction -- but he made a split-second decision to abide by his coach’s pleas.

Kramer actually went directly across the cone, one leg on each side of it, before hopping into the inside lane.”

(For more information, see: <http://olympics.fanhouse.com/2010/02/23/blunder-costs-dutch-skater-gold-medal/?icid=main|htmlws-main|dl1|link3|http%3A%2F%2Folympics.fanhouse.com%2F2010%2F02%2F23%2Fblunder-costs-dutch-skater-gold-medal%2F>)

Just imagine, one mistake, one misstep, cost Sven Kramer his victory, his medal, and everything he had been training for! All his competitors said he was the fastest, and were truly sorry he was “DQ”. They all agreed he should have had the gold medal. However, he failed to follow the rules, was disqualified, and did not get the prize.

Not only were his competitors sorry for this turn of events, but some internet fans argued for a lighter punishment, and suggested perhaps a few seconds be added to his time, or similar penalties, so he could still “medal” in the race. It didn’t matter what others thought, though. He was “DQ”. Rules are rules!

What can we learn from this story? I believe I see some applicable spiritual lessons for us today.

Three Slower Men Won the Race

Ecclesiastes 9:11 says, *“I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.”* This passage came to mind, because Mr. Kramer’s experience is a prime example of the race not going to the “swift”! In the race Tuesday, three men who were slower than the fastest man there won medals! Why did this happen? It was because he broke the rules! When the rules

were broken, it did not matter that Sven had gone the fastest. When the rules were broken, it did not matter that he had skated correctly in the other laps! What mattered was he had broken the rules in lap 17, and he would have to suffer the consequences.

In connection with this thought, read II Timothy 2:5 where the apostle Paul makes the following observation (by inspiration, I Cor. 14:37). He told Timothy, *“An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules”* (ESV). Mr. Kramer, though the fastest skater, was not “crowned” because he broke the rules. Only those who competed according to the rules, *and* went fast enough, received the awards! As II Timothy 2:5 shows, we need to make sure we are abiding by the Lord’s rules if we expect to “win” (I Cor. 9:24-27; II Tim. 4:6-8)!

We Are Personally Responsible For Our Actions

Probably the greatest tragedy of all is that ultimately, Mr. Kramer has no one to blame but himself! The report said that he essentially knew what he was doing, but in listening to another man (his coach), he lost his race. His “split-second” decision will now haunt him for the rest of his life!

Let us understand that in the “race of life” (Heb. 12:1), we are responsible for our own actions. James 1:14-15 is but one passage that says we are responsible for our own sins. It teaches us that *“every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.”* Colossians 3:25 says, *“He that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done; and there is no respect of persons.”* Even though Mr. Kramer had a coach; even though he trusted his coach, and his coach seems to be an intelligent man;

“Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.” (Jer. 6:16)

he is still just a man, and capable of making mistakes like the one he made Tuesday (Jer. 10:23)! Therefore, Mr. Kramer is ultimately responsible for listening to or ignoring the advice of his coach when he deems it necessary. He listened to the wrong person and now lives with that decision.

Just as Mr. Kramer was ultimately responsible for his own misstep in the race, so are we responsible for our sins in the "race of life"! It is written, "*Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us*" (Heb. 12:1).

Rules Must Be Followed

When thinking about those who protested Mr. Kramer's "DQ", and suggested a lighter penalty, they need to be reminded that the rules of the game are there for a reason. If athletes do not abide by the rules, then what is the point of playing? What purpose is served if the rules of the game constantly change when we don't like the outcome? So also in spiritual matters, our standard of authority is the Bible (Col. 3:17; I Pet. 4:11). Just like God (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8), the Bible does not change! It has been "*once for all delivered*" (Jude 3), and will stand when this world is on fire (Matt. 24:35)! When God has said certain things will condemn us, then these are what condemn us (Jn. 8:24; Mk. 16:16b; etc.)! When He has said certain things save us, then these are what save us (Mk. 16:16a; Rom. 1:16; Jn. 8:31-32; I Cor. 15:1-2; etc.)! We are not to protest, think of "exceptions", cry, fuss, and moan, but accept what the Lord says and follow His "rules" for life. They are for our benefit (Jn. 10:10b, 6:63; II Tim. 3:16-17)!

God Sees All

Remember that just as those judges held Mr. Kramer responsible for every move on the ice, so also God will hold us accountable for the things we do and say while upon the earth (Ecc. 12:13-14). Solomon said, "*The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good*" (Prov. 15:3). Jesus told the people, "... *every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment*" (Matt. 12:36). Further, the New Testament is clear in explaining that there is a day coming when God will judge the secrets of men (Rom. 2:16). The Corinthians were told, "*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad*" (II Cor. 5:10).

Conclusion

I think it appropriate to remember the words of the apostle Paul to the Corinthians. He wrote, "*But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified*" (I Cor. 9:27, ESV). Mr. Kramer's "split second decision" cost him the gold, and the race itself. Let us be careful lest a "split-second decision" we make in life cost us even more! (Matt. 16:26)!



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A New Aspect Of Our Evangelistic Work

Our television program, "The Ancient Landmark", is now online! This is an exciting blessing because it means not only can people in Owensboro access this program and learn the truth on channel 72; but now not only in Owensboro, but also all over the world, people can access past episodes and take part in Bible study and learn what God has said via our website.

In a society with advanced technology, it is necessary that we take advantage of opportunities like this in order to get the gospel out (Mk. 16:15; II Tim. 2:2). The Lord wants the gospel spread, and this is but one way we can do it.

Please remember to pray for this work. Our television program is opening doors for communicating and spreading God's word. Let us be aware of this, and make sure we are taking advantage of opportunities to speak to people so their souls can be saved. (II Tim. 4:2; Mk. 16:15-16)

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